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# **THE POVERTY CONSTRUCT AND ITS RESONANCE WITH THE EXPERIENCING OF DEPRIVATION**

Social Relations in a Jamaican Community

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Submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social and International Studies  
University of Bradford

2010

# ABSTRACT

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## **The Poverty Construct and its Resonance with the Experiencing of Deprivation: Social Relations in a Jamaican Community**

**Keywords:** Jamaica, Social relations, Impoverishment, Poverty policy, Participation, Spatiality, Everydayness, Autophotography

This research provides one account of the complex relationship between differentiated experiences of deprivation and the dominant poverty construct in the Jamaican context. It is based on research conducted over a period of nine months in a Jamaican 'squatter' community, Windsor, in the Parish of St. Ann. The study is organised into two 'positional' chapters (conceptual framework and methodology) and four direct 'response' chapters that demonstrate the ways in which the official poverty approach (from concept to policy) resonates with the living experiences of individuals.

The 'response' chapters step back from debates on the measurement of poverty so as to critically and reflexively consider the construct's conceptual and definitional antinomies. This is done through: (i) an excavation of a partial social history of poverty discourses in Jamaica; (ii) an evaluation of problems with knowledge production in the participatory method; (iii) an examination of the implications of the abstraction of the poor from spatial relations; and (iv) an exploration of different ways in which individuals 'picture' living in their surroundings.

The conclusion drawn is that it is necessary to begin engaging in a multidisciplinary project which accounts for *difference* within the poverty construct. This is because, insofar as it is possible, the removal of the most extreme forms of deprivation is not in itself sufficient for the eradication of the social relations that give rise to these privative 'conditions'. There instead needs to be critical engagement with relations of deprivation as resident in the social body as a whole in conceptualising poverty.

*Dedicated to...*

**The Residents of Windsor**

*Who I owe a great deal for sharing their experiences with me and for allowing me to share their experiences.*

**Betty McDonald, Heather, Robert, Nikki, Javon, Tevauni, Leona and Rafael  
Miss Juliette and Dwayne  
Jen, Sim and little Nhadi**

*Who in different ways have confirmed to me that no one is an island.*

**Brother Vassell**

*Who is more inspirational to my work and to my life than he knows and certainly more than I tend to show or say.*

**Mar and Miss Joan**

*Who I do not know how to thank, except to say that I hope "I love you" is strong, wide and deep enough a message to transmit the weight of feeling that bears down upon me whenever I think of you and all the fortitude, forbearance, pushing, prodding, concern and care you have invested in these last few years. I am not sure there are any words that can effectively convey what I want to express and I must endeavor to find better ones. Until I do, please know: I LOVE YOU.*

**ABOVE AND BEYOND ALL OTHERS, MY GRATITUDE AND DEDICATION  
BELONG TO GOD**

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## ACRYONYMS

AFG	Adult Focus Group
ASSP	Agricultural Support Services Project
HEART	Human Employment and Resource Training Trust
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISER	Institute of Social and Economic Research
JPS	Jamaica Public Service Company
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NPEP	National Poverty Eradication Programme
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PATH	Programme of Advancement through Health and Education
PAU	Participatory Urban Appraisal
PIOJ	Planning Institute of Jamaica
PPA	Participatory Poverty Appraisal
RADA	Rural Agricultural Development Authority
SDC	Social Development Commission
STATIN	Statistical Institute of Jamaica
UDC	Urban Development Corporation
UWI	University of the West Indies
WeD	Wellbeing in Developing Countries
YFG	Youth Focus Group

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

## 1.1. Introduction

Both the Jamaica Gleaner and the Jamaica Observer newspapers in June 2009 reported Ronald Thwaites' (opposition Member of Parliament) call for an "urgent review of poverty statistics". Thwaites declared, "I am concerned about the dissonance between the government and reality" and claimed, "we are misleading ourselves...I am having difficulty coinciding reality with official statistics" (Jamaica Observer, 2009). The problem was that data from 2007 was being used to determine policies in 2009, even after a major economic slump and a widely acknowledged increase in deprivation. As such, Thwaites was particularly disturbed by the fact that "our national statistics, which are being paraded internationally and which are being used to inform our budgetary allocations, are grossly understated" (Jamaica Observer, 2009; Jamaica Gleaner, 2009). Alvin McIntosh, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour, responded by acknowledging there was a problem; "the poverty line statistics need to be reviewed immediately and some consideration given to the quantum of benefit now provided. We fully appreciate what the member is saying". Additionally, McIntosh made clear that "what I don't think this Parliament wants to do is to involve itself in 'samfying' [deceiving] itself and the nation" (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009). The Director of Social Services, Collette Roberts Ridsden, weighing in on the debate noted that "the basket is now being revised by the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ)<sup>1</sup> to make it 'more realistic'" (Jamaica Observer, 2009).

This story of a parliamentary exchange on the inanity and inapplicability of the 2007 poverty line to the living conditions of 2009 embodies within it two characteristic features of how extreme

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<sup>1</sup> The PIOJ is an agency attached the Office of the Prime Minister. It is the main authority on and conveyor of 'knowledge' about poverty in Jamaica.

deprivation and the possibilities for addressing it are framed within the official centres of discourse production. It is firstly illustrative of the accord existing in the policy and mainstream academic realms that poverty, as defined by a lack of the 'basic necessities' of life, can be accurately measured by a well constructed poverty line.<sup>2</sup> Following from this, the story also highlights the consensus on the proposition that for a measurement apparatus to be an effective policy instrument and not *simply* its adherents, it must be "realistic". The expectation is that the official poverty construct and its policy derivatives must resonate with and must mirror the *real* living experiences which they were cumulatively meant to conceptualise, define, characterise, measure and alleviate/reduce/eradicate.

There have been myriad attempts to create "more real" ways of defining and approximating the extent and depth of poverty (Lister, 2004:6); these span across a wide array of disciplines and perspectives. However, as with the governmental dispositions detailed in the story above, the dominant tradition in the social sciences is to view poverty as an economic problem and/or as a lack of material resources (Chambers, 1997:74). This orthodoxy has been challenged by a diverse range of heterodox economists, sociologists and anthropologists who examine the non-monetary aspects of the social phenomena. A few of the reactions to the narrow economism that pervades the study of deprivation have become recognised as worthwhile alternatives. This is the case with Amartya Sen's Capability Theory which has been operationalised through the Human Development Indicators promulgated by the United Nations. Another example is Participation (as championed by Robert Chambers) that has revolutionised methodological approaches within

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<sup>2</sup> Poverty as "basic necessities" is outlined in the Ministry Paper on the government's programme to eradicate poverty (Government of Jamaica, 1997). This accord is not peculiar to Jamaica and has gained exceptional international preeminence. This was cemented by the 189 countries who signed up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and made their number one priority to halve between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of persons whose income is less than \$1 per day – as measured by the World Bank (this was revised to \$1.25 per day in 2008 to reflect prices in 2005) (see, United Nations, 2010; Planning Institute of Jamaica & Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, 2009; Planning Institute of Jamaica & Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2008).



poverty research and development studies in general. More recently there has been growing interest in the 'wellbeing' paradigm (such as the Wellbeing In Developing Countries (WeD) approach) which seeks to measure subjective views of quality of life, life satisfaction and happiness (Camfield, 2006:4). Much of the diversity and debate is welcome to the extent that it breaks the conceptual monopoly of the income/consumption approach. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to consider the caveat that the significance of a variation (for example in literacy or access to water) lies not in the fact that they are *indicators* or transparent reflections of *non-economic well-being*, "but in their implications and consequences for what people can do, which are always shaped by a dynamic and complex interplay" (Du Toit, 2005:5).

In one sense, the experiences, the analyses, the arguments, and the representations which constitute this thesis are coextensive with the aforementioned definitional endeavours in that one of the main aims of this study is to contribute to the active discussions on the efficacy of current constructs. In furtherance of this, the research attempts to critically evaluate how the mechanisms designed to interpret and act on people's lives interact with the meanings people give to their own experiences of deprivation. Yet, in another sense, in relation to the majority of efforts to critically review dominant approaches to poverty, the body of work contained in this study is contradistinctive. Initially, the central objective of the research was to identify and explore *the* popular definition of poverty (which has a number of variants) that was assumed to be extant in Jamaica and then to use this indigenous interpretation (if and when found) to interrogate the viability of the arcane and alien orthodox definition. However, during the data collection process the object of investigation became something radically different and there was no longer a quest for a *more realistic* or *better* 'lived' definition of poverty. Instead, the project became a reflexive engagement with the ways individuals selectively and as appropriate to them, gave meaning to

and took or made meaning from the very instruments that were constructed to delineate and determine the characteristics of their living experiences.

One of the first working hypotheses of the research was therefore very quickly shown to be inappropriate, insofar as it was based on the proposition that there existed (in Jamaica and the target community) a distinct popular concept which could be measured against the dominant poverty construct. What was discovered in the field was the existence of innumerable commixed and/or competing ways of viewing poverty that were rooted in varying discourses (both popular and dominant). Poverty was/is protean and polyvalent. The research question was now: *what is the nature of the relationship between the dominant poverty construct and the ways people experience deprivation?* This introductory section now focuses on how this question was addressed by describing the two 'positional' declarations (Chapters 2 and 4) as well as the four direct 'responses' to it (Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7).

### **1.1.1 The Conceptual Approach (Theoretical Position)**

Chapter 2 is the first of two explicitly positional chapters in the thesis. It is intended to locate the theoretical imperatives that ground my approach. The chapter begins with an explanation of my usage of two *key frames*: the 'relations of deprivation', and the 'process of constructing poverty'. It then goes on to illustrate my general research strategy as a *bricolage* (in the sense of Lévi-Strauss, see Derrida, 1978), before showing how the approach used (as influenced mainly by Bourdieu, Foucault and Williams) has responded to directives drawn from the poverty literature. It is made clear that although Bourdieu's ideas in particular have shaped my 'way of seeing', the actual concepts employed throughout the thesis have been drawn from a wide range of theoretical positions and disciplines.

### **1.1.2 The Archaeology of Poverty in Jamaica**

Chapter 3 bears in mind Bourdieu's, Foucault's and William's elaborations on the importance of finding the social origins of ideas and Lister's proposition that no concept of poverty anywhere "stands outside history and culture" (Lister, 2004:3). Following the direction of these guides, it was viewed as essential to excavate as many fragments as could be found on the historical development of present ways of viewing poverty in Jamaica. This chapter was partly inspired by the insights drawn from my experiences of in the field, but it serves to introduce much of the contours of the debate in the thesis, particularly in terms of engaging Jamaican poverty discourses and literature. As such, it is sandwiched between the conceptual and methodological chapters. It takes a 'chronologically elliptical' approach to tracing some of the significant transformations and retentions in ideas and concepts of poverty from emancipation in 1838 to present-day applications.

### **1.1.3 The Method (Positioning the Research Experience)**

Chapter 4 is the second positional chapter. It introduces the community of Windsor in St. Ann, Jamaica where fieldwork was conducted. The chapter then makes a decisive break in the narrative style of the thesis by providing an autoethnographic account of my encounters. This style was adopted as it was best suited to articulate an intensely self-critical reflection on the co-produced knowledge derived from interactions in the field. It explores my interpretations of the mistakes and successes that were made in my *encounters* with: (a) 'entry' into the community; (b) contradictions within my methodology; (c) epistemological questions on 'getting to know' the subject/object of research; (d) analysis and writing; (e) the limitations of my work; and (f) the ethics of my practice and representations.

#### **1.1.4 The Search for a Local Definition**

Chapter 5 describes an aborted attempt to use participatory methods to *find* a local definition of poverty and shows how many conventional applications of this methodology with its catheches for community and consensus are problematic in terms of dealing with the nuances of impoverishment. An attempt is made to demonstrate the polysemic nature of perspectives on poverty through an exploration of the poverty narratives of four informants. Finally, the contested symbolic space of 'progress' is explored in terms of its implications for the 'developmentalism' that characterises the dominant conceptualisation of poverty.

#### **1.1.5 The Implications of Abstraction from Spatial Relations**

Chapter 6 discusses spatiality as a site for the interplay of myriad forces surrounding relations of deprivation. Beginning with a brief commentary on Brodber's (1975) analysis of the Yard space in Jamaican society and the implications of her work for poverty research, the chapter aims to account for the implications of the abstraction of the individual from spatial relations which are an integral aspect of identity. Interactions in, through and around spaces which structure *representations of space* (Lefebvre, 1991) and which *orient* (Said, 2003) approaches to 'poor people' from 'poor places', are explored. Finally, Patterson's (1982) reading of *Social Death* is extended into the spatial practices of Windsor as an aid in negotiating the incredibly complex and contradictory relationships with surrounding communities and wider society as well as political embodiment and rights.

#### **1.1.6 Autophotography and Living Experiences**

Chapter 7 ventures into the realms of the under-theorised perfunctory living experiences which do at least as much as the more obvious conditions and visible structures to sustain impoverishment.

The research method of autophotography, as pioneered by Ziller (1990), is the point of entry. A group of youths were asked to 'picture' what living in Windsor was like and on collection of their photographs they were asked two separate questions in order to: (a) label each image and (b) explain the *story* of each of the images. The labels are analysed as a level of interpretation distinct from the more extended stories and used to show the different theories and aesthetics of Windsor. Then, a selection of the stories are arranged into three photo-essays and used to reflect on the *everydayness* of going through suffering drawing on de Certeau (1984) and Augoyard (2007). The issue here is the fact that approaches to poverty cannot usually account for the *liminal* in relations of deprivation, even though the minutia of how people feel and experience inevitably impact on how they interpret and respond to their social world.

### **1.1.7 Recapitulation and Proposals for Jamaican Poverty Research**

Chapter 8 steps back from the specific inquiries described above so as to consider the overarching question of the relationship between poverty and experiences of deprivation. It takes the body of work holistically as opposed to looking in turn at the findings of each section. As such, the chapter is a comprehensive review of the entire project in terms of its direct response to the main research question. There is an evaluation of: (a) the context of the research; (b) the pivotal moment in the field that changed the research design; (c) the various principles applied and the various proposals that might aid in resolving the problems identified. The chapter ends with a discussion of the presence and absence of resonance in the dominant approach to poverty.

## 1.2. Conclusion

The Government of Jamaica claims to have reduced poverty between 1990 and 2007 from 28.4% to 9.9%, thus exceeding its poverty target for the Millennium Development Goals (Planning Institute of Jamaica & Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, 2009). Yet, everyday popular sounds blast from busses and houses with outcries such as: “Emergency! We ah suffer round here!” (Vybz Kartel, *Emergency*, 2006), or “Dem too deceiving! From those time till now, poor people been suffering” (Fyakin, *Poverty is at Hand*, 2009). *Sufferer songs* which are derived from and which also often inform popular impressions, tell a story that is diametrically opposed to the account provided by official figures. As such, when Ronald Thwaites (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009) in parliament decried the “dissonance” between the government’s current poverty statistics and “reality”, the reality being referred to was a reified entity that was conceived and defined in abstraction from the meanings that many people give to their experiences. To the extent that this is so, even as the statistics become “more realistic” through more precise calculations of indicators, they will continue to fatally deny the social relations at the heart of the deprivations being measured. This debilitating poverty *reality* undoubtedly comes to structure aspects of how deprivation is viewed and experienced, but it is also co-opted, modified and resisted. The conclusion drawn here is that thinking relationally may lead to a re-conceptualisation of poverty which begins to engage with experiential narratives. It is believed this would allow for a more fluid definition which has at its core the vision of a society with as few incidents as possible of suffering that is caused by symbolic and material deprivation.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Poverty and the Experiencing of Deprivation: Conceptualising the Social Relations of Impoverishment**

## 2.1. Introduction

*The representation of the social world is not a given, or (which amounts to the same thing) a recording or a reflection, but the product of countless acts of “construction”, always already made and always to be remade.*

— Bourdieu (2008:193)

Drawing on both poverty and more general literature, this chapter engages with and details the academic works that have structured my attempt to interrogate the dominant approach to responding to experiences of deprivation in the Jamaican context. It begins by outlining two ‘key frames’ which are the precepts as drawn from the literature that have been central in organising the discussions in the chapters that follow. Then, taking its cue from directions or directives rooted in the recent debates on defining poverty, there is an exposition of the particular approach taken in this research on the relations of deprivation as influenced by Bourdieu, Foucault and Williams.

## 2.2. Key Frames

That *there is too much poverty in the world* is an oft heard proclamation in national and international official declarations, in academia, in the media and in folk wisdom. This may indeed be the consensus of our times. In this thesis, I attempt to directly confront our ‘ubiquitous predicament’. But the questions asked are not: How many individuals are *in* poverty? Or, how do we solve poverty? Rather, the problématique is formulated here as a critical interrogation of how



poverty, as officially defined, resonates with the *experiencing of deprivation*. The issues specifically investigated are: (i) the social history of discourses on poverty; (ii) some of the ways of constructing poverty knowledge; (iii) some of the ambiguities flowing from the abstraction from social relations and their effects; and (iv) the different ways individuals 'picture' and experience deprivation. These respond to an inquiry aimed at determining the nature of the relationship between the official definition and people's diverse ways of viewing and experiencing deprivation. The arguments on these concerns are diffracted by the extract from Bourdieu which forms the frontispiece of this section. This, along with ideas borrowed from a number of sources, provides a starting point for critical interrogation of the policy and academic representations at issue here. However, before excavating the theoretical bases for the positions taken in this work, it is essential to identify and elucidate some of the key ideas which will be integral in navigating the social relations of the Jamaican community in focus. To do this, it becomes pertinent to turn to the poverty and general literature so as to populate and conceptualise the theoretical framework that will be used with its main terms of reference.

### **2.2.1 The Relations of Deprivation and Poverty**

In his numerous publications on the topic, Yapa (1995, 1996, 1997, 1998) differentiates between the 'substantive' experiences of deprivation such as hunger, malnutrition and lack of shelter, and the discursive construct of poverty which is used to represent these states as a problem – particularly an economic one (arising from lack of income). Yet, Yapa was by no means the first to make this well established distinction (see for e.g., Townsend, 1987; or Callan et al, 1993). In 1908, for instance, Simmel argued:

The poor, as a sociological category, are not those who suffer specific deficiencies and deprivations, but those who receive assistance or should receive it according to social norms. Consequently, in this sense, poverty cannot be defined in itself as a quantitative

state, but only in terms of the social reaction resulting from a specific situation (Simmel, 1965:22).<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Desai (1986:1) constructed the problem as a political and social one claiming that: “only those definitions of poverty which appeal to the widest possible audience would stick”. Sen, who would contribute immensely to transforming ideas on poverty, rejected this policy-based perspective for one that would be more *absolute*. In doing so he cited the United States’ President’s Commission on Income Maintenance which made the following assertion:

If a society believes that people should not be permitted to die of starvation or exposure, then it will define poverty as the lack of minimum food and shelter necessary to maintain life...In low income societies the community finds it impossible to worry much beyond physical survival. Other societies, more able to support their dependent citizens, begin to consider the effects that pauperism will have on the poor and non-poor alike (quoted in Sen, 1979:287).

Sen then goes on to contend that “there are at least two difficulties with this ‘policy definition’”. Firstly, the “making of public policy depends on a number of influences of which the prevalent notions of what should be done is only one” and secondly, “to concede that some deprivations cannot be immediately eliminated is not the same thing as conceding that they must not currently be seen as deprivations”. The distinction nevertheless remains and considerations of different forms (and types) of deprivation are seen to “enter the concept of poverty” (Sen, 1979:304).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The article “The Poor” which appeared in the journal, *Social Problems*, in 1965 is a translation from Simmel’s 1908 publication “Der Arme”.

<sup>4</sup> Sen (1983, 1985) and Townsend (1985) debated whether poverty should be defined and measured in “relative” or “absolute” terms. Yet, their interesting exchanges on that issue were predicated on a common acceptance of the ‘first principle’ in current approaches to measuring poverty. That is, the fact that deprivation can be identified, quantified, and then used to determine a widely agreed upon poverty line. Poverty lines are intended as measures, but they have irresistible definitional power and properties.

Townsend (1987:130) who also acknowledged that “people can experience one or more deprivations without being in poverty”, elaborated extensively on and attempted to measure occurrences of “deprivation” in the United Kingdom. He proposed that:

People can be said to be deprived if they lack the types of diet, clothing, housing, household facilities and fuel and environmental, educational, working and social conditions, activities and facilities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong (1987:126).

He agreed with the view of deprivation as including “all the various misfortunes people can suffer in society” including those that were not material and are therefore traditionally ignored in research and policy (1987:126). In addition, Townsend postulated that concepts of deprivation cannot be understood only “according to some scale of scientific discovery and representation. They are socially ‘structured’ – through a process of familiarity and indifference, advocacy and repetition in social experience and discourse” (Townsend, 1987:127). This means that even at its nadir, human experiences and the understanding of them are inescapably relational – inescapably rooted in societal practices and language. On this point then, some of those who hold liberal/orthodox positions tend to agree with some of the postmodern perspectives on poverty. Yapa (1995:110), for example, shows how particular deprivations are nodes in a nexus which have “a twin character as the site of both discursive and non-discursive practices”. Thus, being deprived of certain social or economic goods partly consists in the objective world and partly consists in how we think of experiences in the objective world.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that *poverty* is not only relational in its constitution as a construct used to define a set of experiences based on research and social understandings of those experiences. It establishes that, even at the most rudimentary level, poverty’s experiential referents are themselves inexorably structured in human interaction and so

intrinsically determined by them. There have been convincing propositions that material scarcity and impoverishment are functions of a society's history and social relations (Green & Hulme, 2005; Lister, 2004). Indeed, always at the foreground of cases of dispossession and occlusion, are the constantly elided or ignored symbolic deprivations which, according to Bourdieu, are congenital to material impoverishments and which, in their co-occurrence, act to reinforce and exacerbate each other (Bourdieu, 1999a, 2008). Green and Hulme's (2005) article on chronic poverty showed how, in some counties, the social status as a widow (in itself confers a symbolic deficit) immediately sets in motion a set of *real* deprivations through processes of asset stripping which are "politically institutionalised within customary, statutory, and common law systems that licence and perpetuate such processes of impoverishment" (2005:870). The coextensive interaction between the symbolic and the material in relations of deprivation is one theme of my research.

The most glaring fissures between the varying positions on poverty begin to emerge when the discussion moves beyond the philosophical point of 'what is poverty' and into its actual definitional delineation. On the one hand, a host of initiatives designed to define, identify and measure poverty have been carved out of widespread experiences of deprivation in varying societies (or even globally). These include incalculable procedural departures and differences in how, why and where different theorists and practitioners *draw the line* (Bevan & Joireman, 1997; White, 2002; Laderchi et al, 2003; Baulch & Masset, 2003; Lister, 2004). On the other hand, more critical theorists see the nature of these definitional and measuring enterprises as inimical to the objective of eradicating deprivation and the suffering it causes. One persuasive proposition is that:

The problems inherent in this approach have created a situation where competing measurements – substituting for definitions – are put forward in an endless and largely futile

argument about whose particular measurement is to count...It is almost as if, having established the relative nature of poverty, research is keen to fall back on the most minimal relative definition as a way of defending it (Novak, 1995:61).

Rooted in his idea that the explanation of poverty has to be sought in the class relationships of capitalist production, Novak (1995:63) saw the struggle against poverty as “not just a struggle to make impossible ends meet, but also one to maintain a sense of self-worth and dignity against a society that *creates* you as a failure”.

Another convincing contention is that the dominant definitional exercises as currently constituted (irrespective of their width and breadth) produce through their theoretical machinations, a “poverty sector” with “distinct and stable characteristics whose study will reveal the cause of poverty” (Yapa, 1998:98). An examination of any of the reviews of the various definitions and measurement approaches confirms Yapa’s proposition. For example, Laderchi *et al* (2003:243) begin their evaluation of different poverty approaches by stating: “in official discourse, *e.g.* by the World Bank and major donors, almost every policy is currently assessed in relation to its impact on poverty...To devise policies to reduce poverty effectively, it is important to know at what we are aiming”. Of course, *what we are aiming at* in this context is to identify and isolate those in poverty, to find the causes of their suffering and to provide solutions. In these ‘fixing’ endeavours (which is the ultimate purpose of the current poverty definitions), the preferred policy strategy is to model the poor on the tried and tested values, attitudes and practices of non-poor groups in society. Ostensibly and by definition, since they are ‘non-poor’ (and some even ‘rich’), the appropriate patterns of behaviour may be garnered from this ideal sector, if not the final solution to poverty itself. Thus, one recent “panacea” has been to ‘empower’ the unemployed and other poor categories to replicate ‘successful’ entrepreneurs and thus to create legions of the *entrepreneurial poor* through micro-finance schemes (see, Hanak, 2000; Karides, 2005).

The problem arises here because it was previously established – even by some of those who essentialise ‘conditions of lack’ as endemic to the ‘poverty sector’ – that deprivation is relational. To the extent that this is so, the causes of deprivation cannot be resident in the constitution or characteristics of any single group but in society as a whole. The dominant trend therefore, fatuously (or furtively), abstracts those defined as poor from social relations that are at once academic, economic, and political in order to isolate and treat a contained condition. But in these abstracting machinations those with the power to define and dominate discourses have quarantined away from any critical inspection and left to their own devices (to evolve and to mutate) the inveterate relations that *dis-ease* those categories determined to be *in poverty*. The employment of the term relations of deprivation (rather than deprivation) throughout this thesis is in and of itself an act of resistance that rails against the convention to fix the fixing gaze of research and policy exclusively on those ‘in poverty’ to the exclusion of other ‘innocent’ and unaffected sectors of society.

### **2.2.2 Processes of Constructing Poverty**

Insofar as the preceding propositions are accepted, that poverty is a social construct becomes incontrovertible. Furthermore, it may be argued that to abstract those defined as poor from their relations and conceptually essentialise and entrench their experiences in ‘conditions’ is at best misleading. This practice dismisses the ineluctable ideological contingency of conceptualisations. Additionally, it masks the implications and the ends of the ‘constructive work’ done in definitional processes and in academic or policy-based discourses of poverty. As seen previously, a number of theorists have written against the prevailing winds. Sachs, as one objector to these definitional predilections, in his essay, *Poor not Different*, contends: “‘poverty’ was used to define whole peoples, not according to what they are and what they want to be, but according to what they lack and what they are expected to become” (Sachs, 1990:11, 1992). In accordance with this view,

Yapa (1998:95) states: “the existing academic discourse on poverty contributes to that scarcity and conceals the origin of scarcity”. That there are processes which contain assumptions, interests, prejudices, determinations and consequences for targeted groups (and society as a whole) by which people are classified and characterised as being *in* (or out of) poverty, is not being debated in this thesis. What is in question throughout this work and what is constantly being critically engaged is the issue of how and why the dominant definitional process (*i.e.* the intricacies of official attempts to label people as poor or non-poor) makes its discursive incision where it does and in the way that it does. As a result then, we are concerned with how the poverty construct relates to the experiences of deprivation that come to be used as its *intensions* and *extensions*, and by extension, we are also concerned with what those who are experiencing deprivation make of the construct.

Thus the practice of defining is questioned and the costs of the process of defining are always in question. My view is that it is important to begin to interrogate, unwrap and expose the entanglements of *Producing the Poor* (Pithouse, 2003) or *Constructing Poverty* (Dean, 1992, 1991; Round & Kosterina, 2005). In this way, it becomes possible to reflect on poverty’s ‘conceptual history’ and the effects of relations in the details of this scientific and policy construct. That is, one is able to evaluate the consequences of the transition from generalised deprivations (which are themselves discursive) to discrete definitions (of “poverty”) and characterisations (of “the poor”), then later to identification and measurement (of depth and extent). This is not to disparage the intrinsic importance of defining and measuring, but instead, to call attention to the fact that these processes are not benign.

The stances taken throughout and the arguments made in this thesis have 'borrowed' ideas and concepts from a number of critical traditions, including postmodern thought. However, in relation to definitional processes some postmodern theorists on poverty have made propositions that are rejected here. For example, it has been asserted that "poverty' on a global scale was discovered after the Second World War. Before 1940, it was not an issue" (Sachs, 1990:8). This view about how the development project has been implemented (particularly by Washington Consensus institutions) is not in its entirety incorrect, but the phraseology used (and postmodernists are usually circumspect about syntax) explicitly dissimulates the *history of poverty*. Even if lack of income or 'basic needs' were not institutionally recognised as 'global issues' before the 1940s, this is in no way a preclusion of the fact that at all times and in most (if not all) societies, there have been relations leading to extreme deprivation for and oppression of some individuals and communities. The discipline of development and modern social science may have approached the problem in the wrong way and may have even exacerbated some of these privative relations and created others, but the human suffering that poverty denotes did not begin in the 1940s, nor was it first 'recognised' then.<sup>5</sup>

Even those postmodernists who have argued that to "solve the poverty problem we should first dissolve the language of the poverty sector" (Yapa, 1995:109) have had to concede also that "certainly, identifying households with low incomes helps to administer social welfare programs where such programs exist" (Yapa, 1996:712). The problem, therefore, is not that there are extant processes of constructing poverty, but that it is not made clear what the intentions, the assumptions, the ideologies and, importantly, the effects constituted in these processes are. The

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<sup>5</sup> In the case of Jamaica and other parts of the British Empire, it should be noted that post-slavery the administration was forced to design strategies to deal with those persons in its *protectorates* who were severely materially deprived as well as those who were old and/or infirm. Although not a direct concern of academia until much later, at least in the British Commonwealth, poverty and "Poor-Relief" were in many ways, major issues from the 1860s onward (Carter, 1993; Jamaica Gleaner, 1875, 1885, 1892).



constant epistemological reorganisations that take place within the World Bank and similar institutions stand as exemplifications of the instability between declared aims and actual purpose (see for *e.g.*, Whitehead & Lockwood, 1999). In practice, the abstraction of the conditions and characteristics of the 'poor figure' from their relational groundings is accomplished regardless of the method used (participatory or arcane indices-based measures). This means the social loci of deprivation are concealed by the scientific structuring of and preoccupation with *poverty indicators* which also actively obscure the effects of constructive work. Almost intractably, the methods to this madness remain hidden.

Statistical instruments may be able to more or less accurately capture the number of persons that experience particular kinds of deprivations and this is undoubtedly an indispensable service to societies. However, the debilitating casuistry in defining poverty occurs when specific experiences/conditions/characteristics subsume or displace investigations into the underlying interactions that surround deprivation. Moreover, these very 'conditions' are often exacerbated as their establishment as scientific facts underwrites their abstraction from any relational constitution and sanctions their reified projection onto individuals and groups. To "target" and "reduce"/"alleviate" effectively, the repairing programs based on these definitional structures must distinguish between the different types of poverty (*e.g.* relative/absolute or income/capabilities, *etc.*) and different types of poor people (*e.g.* the able/unable or deserving/undeserving, *etc.*). So begins the birthing of the scientific *character* of the "poor man", *homo pauperis* and so begins the dispensing of programmes to 'support' the *deserving poor* alongside the disincentives to 'fix' the behaviours of the *undeserving poor*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dean (1991) provides an excellent discussion of 'constructing', 'partitioning' and 'characterising' the poor in the UK.

As these facts take conceptual hold of the collective imagination and become embedded in social understanding and practice, it is left to the critical traditions to ask: by what processes have these assumptions become immovable truths and to what end? The interrogation of the mechanisms by which the poor are labelled is an important concern of this thesis. A historical assessment of discourses and the genesis of dominant project of defining poverty in Jamaica will be conducted in the next chapter. This was conceived, in part, as an answer to Bourdieu's dictate that "all sociology should be historical and all history sociological" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:90). It is also possible to recognise an investigation into present ways of viewing poverty in Foucault's assessment of the "dismemberment" of the generalised status of the pauper in France and other European societies (1980a:167-171). In his assessment, Foucault contends that in seventeenth century charitable and assistance practices there were a range of undifferentiated factors such as infirmity, old age, inability to find work and destitution, "which composed the figure of the 'necessitous pauper' who deserves hospitalisation". The decomposition of this *regime of truth* is charted alongside the emergence of another that was directly linked to maximising the extraction of productive value from all 'able bodies' in service of society (Foucault, 1980a:168).

According to Foucault (1980a:169), the eighteenth century brought the first "progressive dislocations of these mixed and polyvalent procedures of assistance". This "dismantling", was called for on the basis of "a general re-examination of modes of investment and capitalisation". Administrators and economists waded in with their criticisms of the reigning systems and more meticulous observations of the population led to the drawing of distinctions between the different categories of unfortunates. What Foucault describes is a "process of the gradual attenuation of traditional social statuses" or the evolution of a process of pooring where the "pauper is the first to be effaced, giving way to a whole series of functional discriminations (the good poor, the bad poor)". This recalibration has as its "practical objective at best to make poverty useful by fixing it

to the apparatus of production, at worst to lighten as much as possible the burden it imposes on the rest of society” (Foucault, 1980a:169).

Of particular note here is the fact that the scientific and policy acts of dismantling and reformulating did not necessarily *create* or *cause* the conditions defined as poverty (or disability *etc.*) though it *created* the objective categories that would scientifically probe them. The central mandate of this burgeoning ‘way of seeing’ was to determine new ways of isolating and addressing various social ills by means of assessing the internal characteristics assigned to each category in the interests of the *common good*. This “utilitarian decomposition of poverty” (Foucault, 1980a:169) did what remains at the centre of policies today: it concentrated on alleviating identified poverty – and/or putting the poor to work – without asking the crucial question: what relations between individuals and groups have set in motion these observable conditions of deprivation? The fact that this was not a central concern is a confirmation of the aphorism: *the point of view creates the scientific object* (Bourdieu *et al*, 1991:33).

For the Caribbean, the ‘creation of the objective category of poverty’ extends from the representations adopted from the British colonial craft of procuring labour to the demands and exigencies of ‘nation building’ and currently, to the paradigm of developmentalism. Chambers (1995:180) alluded to the fact that the “classic pattern in erudite analysis is to start with a recognition that poverty is much more than income or consumption but then to allow what has been measured to take over and dominate”. In Jamaica, there has been a pernicious process wherein the absolute poverty measure has come to subsume the definition of poverty. There is almost unanimous recognition of the fact that a poverty line measure (absolute or relative) is different from a concept or definition (Chambers, 1995; Lister, 2004). Nevertheless, in Jamaica,

all other terms are subservient to the measure in many scholarly and policy-based engagements on the issue. For example, in her evaluation of the Jamaican National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP), Salmon (2002:81) attempts to show how the programme “constitutes the most organised and comprehensive approach of any Jamaican government to poverty eradication”. She posits that the government deliberately chose the term “eradication” as “it believes the country must not be merely satisfied with easing the pain of poverty; it has instead made a commitment to eradicating poverty over time” (Salmon, 2002:81). Yet, the NPEP (and other such programmes), though recognising the “multidimensional nature of poverty” (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2008:1), is premised on an absolute poverty definition and its policy offshoots rigidly target (and often miss) the absolutely worst levels of exclusively *income-based* deprivation (Osei, 2002). Thus, even if the NPEP accomplished its targeted aims, though admirable, this result could not be regarded as “eradication” of the defined phenomena. But measure subsumes definition. It is this intellectual wreckage which has been placed at the centre of poverty discourses that is at issue here. The various derivations from it will be referred to throughout the thesis as, the dominant/orthodox/official and definition/approach. These are all contained within what has been termed, the Jamaican *poverty construct*.

Following Said (2003:115), the techniques that determine who is poor or non-poor, may be considered as procedures which convert the domain of deprivation into “treatable, and manageable entities”.<sup>7</sup> If we accept further that the *truth* of poverty and the *truth* about the poor “is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses” (Foucault, 1991b:73), then for those with critical proclivities, it becomes imperative to want to scrutinise varying aspects of the nature of the relations of power

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<sup>7</sup> Said was referring to the way in which Asia was studied, interpreted and represented in the service of European identity.

sustaining and dispensing these “apparatuses” of truth. It is this ambition which forms the *raison d’être* of my research. Also, it is this point that Said (2003:272) takes up in his prescient proclamation that representations are embedded first in the language, then the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. Ultimately, this means that each new contribution to a field, such as a new definition or measurement of poverty, “first causes changes within the field and then promotes a new stability” (Said, 2003:273). Participatory approaches are extremely relevant here in that they shook and permanently ruptured the foundations of monetary modes of defining and *representing* the poor, but now (as predominantly applied) have become institutionalised, and worse, they have been co-opted into confirming already established conceptualisations of poverty. Cornwall (2000) has proposed that:

For some, the proliferation of the language of ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ within the mainstream is heralded as the realisation of a long-awaited paradigm shift in development thinking. For others, however, there is less cause for celebration. Their concerns centre on the use of participation as a legitimating device that draws on the moral authority of claims to involve the poor to place the pursuit of other agendas beyond reproach. According to this perspective, much of what is hailed as ‘participation’ is a mere technical fix that leaves inequitable global and local relations of power, and with it the root causes of poverty, unchallenged (Cornwall, 2000:15).

As will be developed in later chapters, the belief and claim that researchers are able to directly access and accurately reflect the unadulterated views of the poor within a *truly* genuine and indigenous definitional project has the potential (despite the best intentions) to concretise select views and confer further symbolic defeats on some participants and perhaps on the group as a whole.

Bourdieu reflecting on Foucault’s work reiterated the point that “*there is a political history of the production of truth*”. In this sense, the scientific gaze can be seen to be “structured not only by the

system of knowledge it implements, but also by the social relationship of domination within which it operates” (Bourdieu, 1985:85, emphasis added). Hulme and Toye (2006:1090), in making the case for “cross-disciplinary” studies in poverty research, have raised a similar point claiming that investigations are brigaded into strict “‘units of assessments’ that have little motivation to encourage them across subject boundaries”. Accordingly, if aspects of Foucault’s (1973:108) analysis of *The Birth of the Clinic* were applied to the research of poverty we may learn that “it is natural that observation should lead to experiment, provided that experiment should only question in the vocabulary and within the language proposed to it by the things observed”. Thus, when we define, identify, tabulate, program, and assess based on discrete conditions of deprivation “the analytical structure is neither produced nor revealed by the picture itself; the analytical structure preceded the picture” and as a result, what we are doing is not the discovery of correlations and causes of poverty but “purely and simply a redistribution of what was given by a perceptible extent in a conceptual space defined in advance. It makes nothing known; at most, it makes possible recognition” (Foucault, 1973:113).

Recognising processes of objectifying poverty as at once historical and relational, enables the further recognition that scientific practice operates within certain boundaries. Additionally, this encourages reflection on the fact that beyond our gaze, laying in wait, is the “unthought element common to all individual thought” (to borrow a phrase from Bourdieu, 1969:117). We must begin to look beyond the contents of our constructs and within our own social relations for part of our understandings, and also for part of our solutions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The complexity of social relations and their existence even in the practice of research, only became clear after my inadvertent dalliance with the very processes which I criticise. I started out on this research project seeking to *find* “a local concept of poverty”, but eventually realised I was, in doing so, helping to *construct* that concept. This created the need for an examination of the academic and social history of ‘poverty’ in Jamaica alongside critical investigations into my own methods and those of the dominant approach. This is explored in CHAPTER 5.

## 2.3. A Critical Framework for Thinking/Researching Relations of Deprivation

To evoke social relations, *in toto*, is an all-inclusive enterprise, in that the term refers to all human interaction. Because of this, when taken in its entirety, it is broad enough to represent everything, but too broad to illustrate anything particular. Therefore, when used in its most general sense, social relations as a project of research may become void of meaning. Interrogated here – with a partial view and only partially – are those relations which surround and/or which are complicit in the experiencing of the types of deprivations that are in turn used to define poverty (including the definitional process itself). The question then becomes: in what ways and from what position are these relations to be observed, interpreted and represented?

In the presentation of this study I have employed an analytical and writing approach that was termed *bricolage* by Lévi-Strauss. According to Derrida, Lévi-Strauss saw the *bricoleur* as someone who uses:

“The means at hand”, that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous (Derrida, 1978:360).

In practice, the body of data that is presented was carved up and organised into separate sections, so as to gain a thematic and general understanding. Then, each theme was unravelled piece by piece and reflexively infused with diverse (often disparate) conceptual essences, before finally, the fragments were weaved together into a single narrative.<sup>9</sup> This was in no way an

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<sup>9</sup> See pages 132 to 135.

attempt to “extract the partial truth from each system and cumulate them into a whole truth” (Scott, 2005:119). It was more an exercise in unmasking the mystique of power hidden within the relations of poverty by using *difference* – different data collection and analytical methods, different theories, different disciplines, and even different writing strategies.

Though it borrows from the tradition, this study is not an endeavour in the postmodern deconstruction of the concept of poverty. I concur with Bourdieu’s belief that if poststructuralists deconstructed *deconstruction* itself, they “would discover its historical conditions of possibility and therefore see that it itself pre-supposes standards of truth and rational dialogue rooted in the social structure of the intellectual universe” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:48). In Smith Doody’s (1992) quite characteristic description of postmodernism’s fundamental messages, the salience of Bourdieu’s view becomes palpable. For example, two of the many precepts she outlines are: “Never totalise. Don’t essentialise” (Smith Doody, 1992:227). The first dictate totalises by ‘never allowing’ and thus totally excluding totalisation and the second, in its essence, rests on an ‘essentialised negativity’ towards essentialising. Like all positions (including mine), postmodernism is trapped within its own “regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth” (Foucault, 1991b:73). No singular theoretical pose embodies this thesis. Instead, it moves betwixt and between various theories to adapt and apply the most useful conceptual tools to respond to the question.

As with the narrative style described above, the generation of the theoretical lens through which the relations of deprivation are filtered is accomplished by the work of ‘splicing’. Sutured together are precepts from a number of positions, such as Scott (1986, 1991)(on gender, difference and experience), Said (2003) (on Orientalism), Lefebvre (1991) (on the production of space) and de



Certeau (1984) (on the practice of the everyday), which supplement and/or are used to critically intervene on the three main theoretical inspirations of my work: (i) Bourdieu's *constructivist structuralism* or *structuralist constructivism*;<sup>10</sup> (ii) Foucault's *faceless* theorising of power; and (iii) Williams' *Cultural Materialism*.<sup>11</sup> In what follows, using the poverty literature as a cue, I set Bourdieu, Williams and Foucault (as well as other interlocutors) into critical dialogue with each other focusing on how they feed into this investigation of the social relations of deprivation. By doing this, I hope to reveal the main curves and colours of my way of thinking/researching.

## 2.4. Towards A Critical Synthesis

### 2.4.1 The Centrality of Reflexivity in Poverty Research

In describing some of *The Perils of Measuring Poverty*, Bevan and Joireman (1997:315) positioned themselves as not producing a “technical paper for economists researching poverty”, but rather one which would “encourage everyone who produces, or makes use of findings that claim to have identified ‘the poor’, to reflect on what those findings actually mean”. Though in the way it is often used, the participatory approach has come to unproblematically present findings from the poor. Chambers, as one of its main and earliest proponents, had been more restrained. He proposed:

We can struggle to reconstruct our realities to reflect what poor people indicate to be theirs. But there will always be distortions. We can never fully escape from our conditioning. And the nature of interactions between the poor and the non-poor affect what is shared and

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu is the main inspiration for the critical approach of my work, even though he is not the only conceptual source. As mentioned before, concepts have been drawn from a number of different theorists and theoretical approaches.

<sup>11</sup> In his book, *In Other Words*, Bourdieu (1990:122) describes his “position” as “constructivist structuralism or structuralist constructivism”. Foucault (1989:19) famously declared: “I have no face. Do not ask me who I am” in his work, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. In the article, *Notes on Marxism in Britain Since 1945*, Williams (1976:88-89) describes his arrival to and outlined some principles of the position he termed, “Cultural Materialism”.

learnt...however much I try, I cannot avoid being wrong in substance and emphasis (Chambers, 1995:186).

It is in this sense that this research takes on the need to be critically reflexive and to embrace lessons from those who have practiced the strategy. Bourdieu wrote, in both *The Bachelors' Ball*, and in his *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, that “reflexivity was at the basis of the whole undertaking” in researching the decline of peasant society in France (2008:3, 2007:63). But, reflection was not a *leitmotif* exclusive to the investigations which took place in his native, Béarn. Wacquant summarising Bourdieu’s work noted: “if there is a single feature that makes Bourdieu stand out in the landscape of social theory, it is his signature obsession with reflexivity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:36). In a different way from Bourdieu, starting with an outline of his country origins as the son of a poor signalman, Williams (1975) wrote himself almost seamlessly into the narrative of *The Country and the City*, even as he intervened intermittently to remind the reader of his positionality and to expose the motivations behind his ‘way of seeing’. In this manner, both theorists are *in* their respective works as subject and object. Furthermore, both approaches resonate with feminists whose ways of researching and writing have informed my endeavours to identify and be critical about the “relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions” (Haraway, 1988:579).

Particularly relevant is Opie (1992) who has reflected on and outlined a program for recognising the limitations in feminist interpretations. In her article on the appropriation of the ‘other’, Opie was able to effectively demonstrate how “reflexion on the limit leads to reflexion on the limits of reflexion” (Bourdieu, 1985:86). This application of reflexivity has extended in important ways my ideas on the distortions that positions and positionality may have on data. For example, Opie (1992:52) cautioned that, although at one point feminism may be “liberatory” it may also

appropriate the data to the researcher's interests and silence those experiential elements which challenge or disrupt preconceptions. However, even a careful reflexive approach which attempts to "account for the construction of the subject" within the framework (Foucault, 1991b:59) will inevitably contain some amount of appropriation since it is impossible to write beyond our own ideological composition (Opie, 1992:57).

## 2.4.2 The Social History of the Social World

Green has contended that "what constitutes knowledge about poverty and the demarcation of the poor" is directly a consequence of the relations of power as deployed by academics as well as experts from international organisations and national governments. As such, poverty becomes a subject and "the poor, who by definition lack the resources and entitlements to reframe the terms of this engagement, become objects of study" (2006:1113). It is in this domain that this thesis aims to make one of its main contributions to the debate. In particular, Chapter 3 provides an 'archaeology of poverty discourses'. In this way the *social history* of the construct comes into question.

Williams (1975) in *The Country and the City* takes literature as history, or rather – to use Gossman's (1989:12) phrase – it "challenges the institutionalised boundary between 'history' and 'literature'". Yet, even more than this, Williams (1975) expertly extracts from literature – that he both infuses with and connects to history – a (sometimes hidden) "social order" and shows the development of *structures of feeling* around the "urban" and the "pastoral". The peeling back of the façade by working back and forth from artistic representations to historical *knowledge*, enabled Williams to discover that the idealised discourses and imaginaries that upheld (and to some extent still uphold) the 'town-and-country' fiction "served: to promote superficial

comparisons and to prevent real ones” when what was needed as a response to the oppression was a “change of social relationships and essential morality” (Williams, 1975:71). As identified by many academics who currently engage in debates on poverty, official and dominant representations of poverty, as they currently stand, may be (unconsciously) performing a similar function. That is, through their definitional strategies, they may be constructing domains of thought which obscure the need to address the relational aspects of deprivation in the societies in question (Bevan & Joireman, 1997; Bracking, 2004; Green & Hulme, 2005; Green, 2006). Uncovering whether or not this is so, in part, requires a historical unpacking of the ways in which poverty has been used and an exploration of its emergence as a conceptual shibboleth. Accordingly, Bourdieu (2008:194) remarked that “the social history” of the “social world forms part of the critical preliminaries of the science of the social world”.

In the representations presented here, I recognise that any endeavour aimed at comprehensively interpreting “the social conditions of the social categories of the natural or social world that may be at the root of the very *reality* of this world” is “strictly speaking interminable” (Bourdieu, 2008:196). Yet, I adhere to Williams’ (1975:49) proposition that “in every kind of radicalism, the moment comes when any critique of the present must choose its bearings between the past and the future”. I have therefore attempted to discuss poverty from a position that responds to the calls/gaps in the literature by drawing from disparate concepts. This has led to the view that: (a) because the project of a complete recreation is “interminable”; (b) because all definitions include and exclude; and (c) because they all relate to a ‘regime(s) of truth’; it is essential that any construct designed to identify ‘the poor’: (a) must be ongoing (*i.e.* always ready to recognise new forms of oppression and deprivation); (b) must be open about its methods, purposes and constituted effects; and (c) must also recognise its inevitable contingency (as discursive and not, as it were, *real*).

### 2.4.3 On the Experience of Deprivation and Poverty Analysis

In putting forward the case for micro-level investigations alongside *big* assessments of “what happens on average or to the average poor person”, Hulme (2004:162) posited that, “ultimately, it is individual people who experience the deprivations of poverty, not countries or regions”. Whilst it is accepted here that it is individuals within a relational context who experience poverty, the nature of experience itself, and what researchers can do with it (including what I have done with it) has been brought into question. This aspect of the study engages Chambers’ acknowledgement that in researching poverty, he was attempting to generalise about a diverse, dynamic, and subjective phenomena, but from “*scattered evidence and experience*” that would be “perceived, filtered and fitted together inevitably in a personally idiosyncratic way. Error is inherent in the enterprise. There must always be doubts” (1995:186, emphasis added).

Additionally, it has been posited that “there is not a simple translation from the experience of poverty to its conceptualisation” and that “while poverty everywhere involves people experiencing very real material and other deprivations” the concept of poverty covers a complex set of interrelated life-chances which vary, attract varying interpretations, and are “valued differently in the diverse cultures and sub-cultures of the world” (Bevan & Joireman, 1997:316-317). There is a well recognised need to avoid the flattening and essentialising of experiences that has been a feature of dominant poverty research (Cornwall, 2003; Green, 2006). As a result, the analyses within this study have been invested with insights from those in the ‘empirical’ social sciences who represent the experiential evidence they collect in a way which depicts the “active, partial way of organising worlds” (Haraway, 1988:583).

Indeed, a number of the theorists have eschewed the hypostatisation and “fatuous exaltation of *le vécu* (‘lived experience’)” in research (Bourdieu, 2007:11; Haraway, 1988; Gossman, 1989; Scott, 1991). However, recognition does not by itself escape what Haraway (1988:581) described as the propensity to narrate from a perspective that constructs the experiential as if researchers are able to “leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere” or from everywhere. There has been a consistent effort in writing this thesis: firstly, to *represent* the data as a ‘co-production’ from a structured and inchoate interactive environment; and secondly, to illustrate the identity work, the dissonance and many of the contradictions that permanently stain the narrative. Therefore, when used here, “experience” is to be read as an *ongoing* attempt at discovery, “taking each step as it comes and watching its effects” (Williams, 1983:126). Following Tournier (1987:1), “there is only one word *expérience* for what is really two mental openings into the external world”. The first opening refers to “everyday life” and the second, to the knowledge that can be extracted from it. When a researcher elicits an “experience” it is the deliberate causation of a linguistic phenomenon in order to study its properties *in reality* and “in this sense, one sets up an experiment (*une expérience*) – one engages in experimentation” (Tournier, 1987:1).

In commenting on the possibilities for a qualitative anthropological or sociological perspective on deprivation, Green (2006:1115) contends that such a position “would start from a position of interrogating the assumed categories of analysis and the assumed object of study”. Furthermore, “accounts of ‘poverty’ from this perspective would not seek to refine globally applicable definitions, *nor assume that the experiential dimensions of what was locally categorised as ‘poverty’ across time and space were similar, although there may well be similarities*” (2006:1115, emphasis added). It is in responding to this that a concerted effort has been made to represent diversity in experiences and to draw on those concepts that would allow capacity for difference in *being poor* even where there is an ostensible “being-in-common” (Nancy, 1991). According to

Scott (1991:785), essentialised views of identity, tend to obscure the contested processes by which class, poverty and other such analytical constructs are conceptualised and the diverse ways that subject positions are assigned, felt, contested or embraced. It is only ever possible to see partially and so understandings of structures must recognise that it has, or even seek to find, its own ruptures and exclusions.

Foucault's idea of "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980b:82) along with Williams' partiality for the poor have provided the impetus for what was sought in the field and what is being represented in this narrative. I have also drawn from de Certeau (1984) who goes even further in his articulation of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, to show how innumerable everyday doings can be distinct ways of experiencing and operating (de Certeau, 1984:xiv; Augoyard, 2007; and Lefebvre, 1987). Nevertheless, there has been a constant endeavour not to totalise "objective structures" in the erroneous belief that "the real itself speaks through the discourse of the sociologist" (de Certeau, 1984:57).

When spoken, language is lived, even as it brings itself to bear on the living realities of individuals and groups. As such, it can only be accessed partially and with partiality since human perceptual systems are "active" and build "on translations and ways of seeing" (Haraway, 1988:583). The reflection on practice and evidence as well as the inter-active referents chosen to present the analyses (e.g. experiencing or relations of deprivation) are intended to demonstrate a

commitment to language and rhetoric not as moments in the narrative, but as its “deep structure” (Gossman, 1989:16).<sup>12</sup>

#### 2.4.4 Immigrant Ideas and the *Bricoleur*

The “immigration of ideas” rarely occurs without the original forms incurring “damage in the process, this is because such immigration separates cultural productions from the system of theoretical reference points in relation to which they are consciously or unconsciously defined” (Bourdieu, 1991:163). The theoretical and narrative *bricolage* that is used to interpret and represent the experiencing of deprivation has no doubt on occasion distorted, and at other times reshaped the conceptual “means-at-hand” (*i.e.* those tools that were drawn on so as to incisively cut through the mystique of poverty). Yet, it is not only the theoretical emigrants that have responded, changed and adapted. I, also, have been pulled to and fro by the unearthing of ideas from different disciplines and from exposure to disparate concepts from various traditions. Despite this, my system of thought was always already predetermined along a critical trajectory (as informed by Bourdieu, Foucault, and Williams). Indeed, even before my exploration of other views I was armed with a questioning disposition, not so much from the actual concepts of my main theoretical inspirations, but from how they were practiced: I was already suspicious of myself and my way of seeing/doing; suspicious of the identifiable discourses; and suspicious of different forms and uses of power. But, I was also driven to oppose oppression where ever I found it and predisposed to value the highest, the opinions of those considered the lowest.

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<sup>12</sup> Conversational analysis is not done in this research. However, in most references to statements made by respondents, an attempt has been made to provide both interviewer and interviewee talk. This is to represent responses as a part of a discursive event and in this small and imperfect way, to give further integrity to the narrative.



## 2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has been written as a manifesto for the body of work that constitutes this thesis. Along with the methodological discussion in Chapter 4, it is one of two positional addenda which are intended to cultivate an understanding of my *representational* practices: in my reading of the literature, in my movements through the field, in my analysis and in my narrative strategies. Here, I have tried to delineate the main ‘curves and colours’ of the “bricolage” that forms my mode of writing, and that, informs my system of thought. The ground for my conceptual framework has been prepared by laying out two of the ‘key frames’: relations of deprivation, and processes of constructing poverty (and thereby the poor).

I have then attempted to chart the critical schemata deployed in this thesis by taking as my point of departure some concerns raised in the poverty literature. This was done by setting into interaction ideas drawn from Bourdieu and two of the other main inspirations, Foucault and Williams. All the conceptual tools adopted here have been amended, altered, and in effect, ‘doctored’ by the particularities of the research/researcher and those of the subject area. As such, rather than directly applying a specific set of analytical structures designed to interpret the world, I try to engage with and learn from a wide range of them. Also, I have endeavoured to incorporate Bourdieu’s critical way of viewing the social world which questions and historicises the “divisions through which it organises itself” (Bourdieu, 2008:194) with Foucault’s and particularly, Williams’ affinity for writing from the perspective of the *downpressed*, dispossessed and the despised. I end with the acknowledgement that, because I am structured in specific ways, and because I have structured my practice in specific ways, the representations I make are my best efforts at finding

and exposing *truths* about relations of deprivation, but they are nevertheless always contingent and always *partial*.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **“Sense Mek Before Book”: An Archaeology of Popular and Official Representations of Poverty in Jamaica**

### 3.1. Introduction

The introductory section of the recent publication titled *A New Perspective On Poverty In the Caribbean* begins by asking, "why do we need a new perspective?" (Wint & Renard, 2007:1). This seemingly innocuous query is burdened by a very complex presupposition. It suggests, even if quite subtly, the existence of such fundamental lacuna(e) in Caribbean approaches to interpreting and addressing poverty as to warrant reformulation. In the brief discussion that followed their question, Wint and Renard reflect on a number of "factors and developments which may constitute elements of newness in the new perspective" (Wint & Melville, 2007:xiv). However, there is very little engagement with the gaps/misconceptions in past or present Caribbean academic literature on poverty. Additionally, there is no interrogation of the distinctions between the ways poverty is used in different social contexts.

While there is a substantial and growing body of knowledge on the characteristics and experiences of the Caribbean poor (with differential definitions), to date there has been no attempt at a comprehensive assessment of their conceptual origins. Where do ideas of poverty come from? Who defines poverty? What purpose does a definition serve? Without investigating the history of current ways of seeing poverty, any call for a "new perspective" seems somewhat premature. As Bourdieu (2008:194) argued, "there is no way of fully appropriating ones own understanding of the social world than by reconstituting the genesis of social concepts". Even the proponents of constructing a new approach have acknowledged that "new is often a mere repackaging of the old and does not necessarily mean better and embracing the new does not always require discarding the old" (Wint & Renard, 2007:2).

With these factors in mind, this chapter aims to provide a partial genealogy of poverty in Jamaica by tracing the origins and development of poverty as an area of governmental concern and a key topic of academic research. It interrogates the interaction between the prevailing discourses (*i.e.* popular and dominant representations), academia and policy-makers in shaping the conceptualisation, definition and measurement of poverty. The sections that follow adopt a crudely chronological framework to map the evolution of poverty discourses into time periods which capture the socio-economic and/or political factors that have influenced the direction of thought on the topic. There is first an examination of documentary evidence from and literature on the period between the end of slavery and arguably the most significant labour rebellion in Jamaican history (1838-1938). The representations of the poor deployed during this period are taken as a starting point for an investigation of the discourses and counter-discourses that frame current debates on poverty.

The poverty literature between 1938 and 1960 is next in focus in an attempt to trace the evolution of the concept of poverty in Caribbean writing. The discussion then turns to an examination of how the necessities caused by social upheavals in the 1960s played a part in once again frightening the elite into decisive action. Considered also, are some of the interactions in local and international politics between 1960 and 1990 which contributed to the development of the first comprehensive definition and measurement of poverty for Jamaica. Although there is some time overlap with the foregoing, policy and academic studies on poverty conducted between 1990 and the present are interrogated. The aim is to note changes made to the poverty line perspective by the 'qualitative turn' and to describe the participatory principles that have grown to dominate examinations of impoverishment in the Caribbean.

Having retraced the academic and official development of the current modes of conceiving of and reacting to poverty, an effort is then made to highlight the alternatives to the dominant ways of framing questions of impoverishment. Thus, a section is devoted to strands of thought (1975-current) which originated mainly within feminist inquiries and which operated outside the absolute poverty consensus by representing poverty as social suffering. Finally, popular discourses of poverty are explored, as expressed through music and academic work on Jamaican culture. This permits reflection on the difficulties (if not impossibilities) of creating a closed conceptual framework of poverty in the Caribbean. Perhaps more importantly, this archaeology illustrates the importance of those narratives of suffering which must be tapped into by any poverty construct if it is to resonate with people's lived experiences with deprivation.

### **3.2. The 'Travelling Torch' of Poverty: From Labouring for a Plantocracy to Serving an Empire (1838-1938)**

The system of slavery that had prevailed for centuries in the British Caribbean until the 1830s, meant that black men and women in these New World colonies "were subject to not only theft of their labour, but of their spouses, their children, their religion, their culture and their languages" (Nourbese Philip, 1992:76). Before emancipation, the enslaved masses existed in a state of absolute dispossession (even of their personhood). Therefore, poverty as a means of characterising the experiences of the inhabitants (first the black majority and then applied generally to deprived groups) of the British Caribbean, could only have conceptually emerged after *freedom* was secured. One direct exemplification of this is the fact that the British government after declaring the end of slavery in 1834 compensated the slave holders with £20,000,000 and instituted a further four-year mandatory period of bondage or "apprenticeship"

(Campbell, 1985; Niaah, 2003; Soares, 2008). These concessions were partly meant to rescue many slave owners from the 'poverty' which might have occurred with the loss of their instruments of labour. On the other hand, the continued extreme deprivation of the majority of the black masses was considered a part of the natural order.

In England, as in the rest of Europe, there had already been long established administrative systems for dealing with poverty and entrenched ways of viewing the poor (Foucault, 1980a). While discourses generated in Jamaica would borrow greatly from these currents, Jamaican perspectives would also necessarily be rooted in local peculiarities. As will be developed below, the exigencies of the Jamaican context, particularly in terms of the practical need for labour, would lead to the direct creation of an "artificial poverty" (as described by its architects) so as to sustain social order (Holt, 1992). Also, the racial composition of the island meant that these relations of deprivation were inextricably intertwined with representations of the poor. There has always been a unique bond between statecraft and discourses on impoverishment and as such it is appropriate to refer to the ever adaptable 'travelling torch' of poverty (Niaah, 2003). This torch, like the despair that fuelled it, would move and evolve through the plantation society, the British Empire, a nascent conservative Jamaicanism, an anti-imperialist Nationalism, and into the reigning 'economistic developmentalism'.

As early as two years after emancipation, a number of critics were decrying the legislations passed in the Jamaican Assembly as being "of a two-fold character – partly penal, and partly protective. *Penal* as regards the labourer, and *protective* as regards themselves" (Anti-Slavery Reporter, 1840:22). Yet, because England was taken as the ideal model for social organisation, there was deference, on the part of the allies of the masses (and also in some quarters of the

labourers themselves), to the 'good intentions' of the Colonial Office. This fuelled a belief that no cure existed for the injurious practices of the Jamaican legislature except "a rule, that no act shall go into operation until it has received the sanction of the Queen in council" (Anti-Slavery Reporter, 1842:60). But, the "Queen in council" (*i.e.* the Colonial office) had already determined that the primary objective of the emancipation project was to facilitate the transformation "from bondage to freedom without overthrowing the existing apparatus of social order in the passage" (Holt, 1992:34). There was, as Bakan (1990:68) states, "a critical ideological contradiction in this project". Slave society was one of absolute domination maintained by threat of arbitrary violence whereas the new 'free' system would require other new forms of domination – but by what means? In answer to this question, Bakan (1990:69) posits that to maintain workers within a system of free wage labour, it would be necessary to develop a Gramscian "form of ideological hegemony". To attain this hegemony, the ruling classes would be forced to "provide their former slaves with a set of ideas that allowed them as free men and women, to *choose* to support the command and rule of an exploiting class they had come to despise and fear" (Bakan, 1990:69). Bakan's analysis misses the nature of the conflict that would be encountered by plantocracy. What the planters found was that ideology and hegemony have their limits. The crisis the plantation system faced was that no amount and no kind of ideology would have been enough to break the fortitude of the defiant disinterest in doing 'King Sugar's work' and convince the newly freed people to labour for them *consistently* and *steadily* as and when needed.

The ex-slaves flooded from the plantations in a way that threatened the entire plantation system and thousands of them, in their own ways, struggled and endured incalculable hardships so as to establish themselves as independent beings with rights, responsibilities and free choice. Consequently, it was the economy and the law that would become the means through which the



labourers would be forced to submit to the planter's insistence on their subservience and servility. The flesh tearing stings of the whip (along with mutilation and hanging) had maintained slavery, but a new economic brutality would now be unleashed as executed through the state and supported by the centralised control over the means of violence. Ideology was of course integral to this programme, since the only way to ensure the successful deployment of such extreme material and symbolic dispossession was to ground it in a logical justificatory discourse. However, it was continued material and symbolic dispossession that would be the *tour de force* of the strategy to maintain the social system.

A preoccupation with labour surrounded ideas of poverty and informed the dominant views on the problem associated with putting the ex-slaves into productive employment in service of the planter class. In communication after communication, and report after report, official opinion was being shaped around the idea (in more or less extreme versions) that the end of slavery meant the inevitable decline of the Jamaican society and economy due to the ex-slaves' predisposition to profligacy, sexual depravity, idleness, laziness and thievery (House of Parliament Papers, 1839). The main issue of governance in this context was how to secure labour in the interests of the plantocracy. To this end, successive Colonial Secretaries would engage policy wars with the Jamaican Assembly about the best way to ensure that peasants would be compliant in providing *steady* and *continuous* labour. For instance, in opposing Governor Elgin's regressive road taxes introduced in 1843, James Stephen, aide to Colonial Secretary Stanley, remarked that while there were "plausible arguments" for creating an "*artificial poverty*" through indirect tax measures so as to force the masses into labouring for wages, "the imposition of direct taxes with any such view could not be vindicated" (Stephen quoted in Holt, 1992:203).

In deliberately dispensing suffering and hardship, the environment for violent resistance was being nurtured. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1865, one day before the outbreak of one of the most significant post-emancipation rebellions in the Caribbean, an urgent message was sent to Edward Eyre, the governor of Jamaica. One of its 20 signatories was Paul Bogle, who would later be confirmed as the leader of the imminent uprising. The letter of complaint brazenly articulated that they would no longer accept the egregious administration of justice which accompanied the practices of land appropriations and occlusions. For example, irrespective of the merits of the cases brought against peasants, the system of justice was little more than a means of enforcing the will of the planters (Bakan, 1990:85; Holt, 1992:296-297). The peasants' communiqué was a complaint that presented their impoverishment since emancipation as deliberate and savage; but at the same time it was a warning: "we have been imposed on for a period of 'twenty-seven years' with due obedience to the laws of our queen and country, and we can no longer endure the same" (Jamaica Royal Commission, 1866:1081).

This letter which was immediate to the Morant Bay Rebellion built on: (a) popular narratives on poverty; (b) a growing sense of injustice within those poverty narratives; and (c) on the fringes, calls for "prudent" resistance (against the advice of many elite allies of the masses) (House of Parliament Papers, 1866a:257-258, also see pages 263-264; Williams, 1866:42-44). As such, neither the popular concepts of poverty, nor violent resistance to the social relations creating them, were generated independently. Instead, they closely interacted with (even if they were not directly produced by) already existing counter-hegemonic discourses (Holt, 1994:391-392). Of particular note, is a communication received on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 1865 by Edward Cardwell, Secretary of State for British Colonies. The dispatch contained, *The Humble Petition of the Poor People of Jamaica and St. Ann's*. In their entreaty to the Queen, the "poor people of Jamaica and

St. Ann's" outlined the travails of the peasants (e.g. inability to find work, underpay and exploitation) and put forward a bold proposal for the amelioration of their unsustainable condition. They requested access to a grant of Crown Land for which they would "thankfully repay your Sovereign Lady by instalments of such as we may cultivate. Your humble servants is willing to work so that we may be comfortable" (House of Parliament Papers, 1866a:136).<sup>13</sup>

Six months after the "humble petition" to the Queen had been received, ridiculed and roundly rejected, some "poor people of Jamaica" who thought the "oppression is too great" and could withstand no more of it rose up in bloody revolt (Jamaica Royal Commission, 1866:1082).<sup>14</sup> By the end of the Morant Bay Rebellion which began on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1865, in all 20 whites were killed, the upheaval had spread 75 miles within three days and martial law was declared across large parts of the island (Craton, 1988:153). But, the deployment of troops and the use of the Maroons quickly contained the uprising and allowed Eyre to unleash "a reign of terror never before witnessed in the suppression of popular black discontent in the West Indies" (Hutton, 1995:191). The final account showed: 439 dead (many put to death after speedy trials), hundreds flogged, and 1,000 peasant houses burned (Holt, 1992:302; Craton, 1988:154). The remainder of the labouring and peasant population were then forced to endure a sustained and brutal repression.

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<sup>13</sup> The petition was replied to by the "Queen's Advice" which directed the labouring classes, in no uncertain terms, to work for wages "not uncertainly, or capriciously, but steadily and continuously, at the times when their labour is wanted and for so long as it is wanted" (House of Parliament Papers, 1866a:139). Governor Eyre saw to the distribution of thousands of copies.

<sup>14</sup> In a letter to rebels Paul Bogle who was said to be the leader of the uprising, declared: "it is time now to for us to help ourselves. Skin for skin...Every black man must turn at once, for the oppression is too great" (Jamaica Royal Commission, 1866:1082).

According to Governor Eyre, the primary "origin of the agitation" was "the letter of Mr. Underhill (Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society of Great Britain) and the subsequent meetings that took place" (House of Parliament Papers, 1866b:372). After returning from a visit to the Caribbean, Edward Underhill wrote to Secretary Cardwell on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1865 describing the conditions in Jamaica. The letter began by pointing out that the "alarming" increase in larceny and petty theft "arises from the extreme poverty of the people". There was then a lengthy explanation of the nature of this poverty that pointed to the "ragged and even naked condition of vast numbers" of people and it was argued that "multitudes were suffering from starvation" (Underhill, 1866:14-15). Eyre prophesied, as if the alternative discourses on poverty could by themselves turn the tide of history, that:

Underhill's communication and the circulars from the Baptist Missionary Society will have a very prejudicial influence in unsettling the minds of the peasantry, making them discontented with their lot, and disinclined to conform to the laws which regulate their taxation, their civil tribunals or their political status, all of which they are informed are unjust, partial, or oppressive (House of Parliament Papers, 1866a:135).

This assessment resounds with the Jamaican mantra: *what eye don't see, heart don't leap*. Yet, Eyre, while aligned with one popular Jamaican sentiment on the production of discontent, had grossly misread the temper of the Jamaican masses. As late as November 1864 while on a tour of the very areas that were in open rebellion, he would report that "he found the inhabitants, one and all, animated by the same spirit of warm loyalty, considerate kindness, and generous hospitality" (House of Parliament Papers, 1866b:371).

Almost all blame was laid at the feet of the Baptists (and a few other elite agitators) for exciting the feeble minds of the 'happy peasants' into rebellion. However, an inspection of the language used during the rebellion itself, reveals sentiments antagonistic to the views purported by the

Baptists. For example, the rebels while attacking their victims, proclaimed: "we must humble the white man before us" (Campbell, 1985:38). Such expressions drew from the same resisting reservoir as those peasants involved in a minor disturbance in 1848 who declared that on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August they would "try the comparative strength of the blacks and whites of Jamaica" (House of Parliament Papers, 1849:50).<sup>15</sup> As was aptly observed in the immediate post-mortem of the rebellion, "men happy, contented and without grievance are not so inflammable that their whole state of mind is to be unsettled and overthrown by a letter written by a man in London" (House of Parliament Papers, 1866b:373).

The labourers and peasants might have had allies among some of the elites and might have drawn from the pronouncements and ideas of those sympathisers, but it is evident that their resistance was also drawn partly from their own interpretations of their distinct experiential universe. At this stage then we make our first encounter with the *leitmotif* of this chapter: people's *sense/experience* precedes or informs the intellectual representations of their existence (though these representations may come to shape interpretations of the lived). Therefore, the Morant Bay Rebellion was not the product of external incitement. Rather, it can be seen as "an explicit failure of the British emancipation policy" (Holt, 1992:307). Specifically, it exposed the irreparable contradictions within the British experiment of granting freedom while denying the substance of it in the everyday lives of the masses.

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<sup>15</sup> This comment and the minor disturbance were in response to publications and speeches proposing the transfer of Jamaica's administration from Britain to the United States so that slavery could be reinstated (House of Parliament Papers, 1849:50).

After the rebellion, Eyre voluntarily dissolved the Jamaican Assembly and handed power to the Colonial Office which inaugurated an experiment in "benevolent guardianship" (Holt, 1992; Murray, 1960). According to Craton (1988:155), for ordinary black Jamaicans the only obvious change "was the self-dissolution of the Jamaican Assembly and the substitution of Crown Colony government in 1866, but this was far from a benefit to them". The weight of rule by the Empire was expected to forestall future uprisings and to ensure that "the plantocracy might more easily sustain itself through Councils nominated by 'right thinking' Governors" (Craton, 1988:155). Ultimately, the relative stability that pertained after 1866 proved the Jamaican elite largely correct. Despite the rhetoric from varying liberal governors, the administrators of the affairs of the island persisted in using sophisticated symbolic machinations as well as privative legal and economic mechanisms to discipline, coerce and command the labour of the masses. This can be seen from the 1886 redesign of Poor Relief Law which was carefully crafted to forbid relief "to anyone who was not wholly destitute" and sought to discourage the labouring class' proclivity to indolence (Jamaica Gleaner, 1892). It was argued to be "rare indeed that the peasantry, if so disposed, cannot obtain a profitable outlet for their energies" (Jamaica Gleaner, 1892; see also, Jamaica Gleaner, 1885). Thus, the pernicious poverty imaginary and vernacular had again travelled into a 'new' regime and even into its system designed to alleviate deprivation.

As a number of analyses have shown, it was not until 1938 that the initiative would be seized again to critically fracture and impose substantial changes upon the political infrastructure of Jamaica (Post, 1978; Craton, 1988; Bakan, 1990; Holt, 1992). These ruptures would decisively alter the ways of seeing and dealing with the masses and their ubiquitous if diverse everyday experiences of hardship, struggle and suffering.

In his excellent and comprehensive interrogation of the Jamaican labour rebellion of 1938, *Arise Ye Starvelings*, Post (1978:297) argued:

To say that Quashee<sup>16</sup> stood up in 1938 is to say both everything and nothing. It is everything because, for once, the poor of Jamaica made their own history. It is nothing because there was not one Quashee – he is a stereotype, a reification, a device of the ruling class like shackles or wage labour. Rather, there were many Quashees, each of whom had come by May 1938 to feel that the stereotype must be transcended. That is what happened in Jamaica in 1938.

The events of 1938 may indeed be described as distinct – in form, nature and effects – from any previous moves by the 'poor of Jamaica' to assert the deprived masses as a potent social, political and economic force and thereby compel a recalculation of their value within the social system. What also happened in 1938, as is meticulously chronicled by Post, was: the beginning, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April, of major strikes and disturbances that swept across the island without a single parish being left untouched, the dramatic climaxing of these events in late May where "area after area became convulsed by labour revolt" and the eventual petering out in mid July with minor incidents in the east and west of the island. Though the police was mobilised to protect the interest of capital with brutal force, there was relatively little loss of life over the weeks of rioting.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, these weeks would impel a transformation in structures of governance, in social structures and in the structures of representation (Post, 1969:375, 1978:276-300; see also, Campbell, 1985; Bakan, 1990).

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<sup>16</sup> Campbell (1985:22) has noted that Quashee (or Quashie) was originally the Twi (the main native language of Ghana) for males born on a Sunday. During slavery, the name was conscripted into white ideology and became personification of the stereotype of black people as "deceitful, lying, capricious and lazy" (Chevannes, 1989:5). Chevannes (1989:5-6) states: "after slavery and certainly into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the term Quashee shed its connotation of deceitfulness and acquired instead that of stupid or foolish. It was more hurtful to call one Quashee than to call one stupid". A strong racial element still resides in the term and its standard usage is usually an insidious caricature of the masses as that part of the social body festering with ignorance and depravity.

<sup>17</sup> In the most violent recorded incident on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May the police opened fire on a crowd of strikers killing four persons (Post, 1978:374).

The West India Royal Commission (also known as the Moyne Commission) was appointed in 1938 by the Colonial Office to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the social and economic conditions in all the British territories in the West Indies in the aftermath of the various labour revolts. It "considerably surpassed in scope" many of the gloomy expectations of their work (Post, 1978:371). However, based on the terms of reference within which it was confined, it was evident that the commission was constituted to provide the proposals which would soothe unrest and "refocus consciousness onto more 'bread and butter' issues" (Post, 1978:371). Nevertheless, in some significant ways, their report made definitive shifts in official representations of the masses and official readings of mass protest in the Caribbean. For example, it was conclusively declared, perhaps for the first time, that there was a need to reinterpret the labourers' living and working conditions in relation to their political potential (West India Royal Commission, 1945:8). In addition to this, the interrogation of the causes of the rebellion, though within strict probative limitations, led to a thorough uncovering of much of the suffering which pertained in almost all areas of life for the masses in the Caribbean.

Crucially, the report concluded that "the belief that land is always available on which poorer people outside larger towns can eke out a living is often illusory" (West India Royal Commission, 1945:195-196). Though these interrelations would not be thoroughly examined, the prevalence of disease and ill-health was affixed to repulsive housing and sanitary conditions while the state of housing and "deplorably low standard of life" was affixed to rates of earnings, scarce and seasonal employment and limited public assistance. In so doing, the Commission (maybe unwittingly) discredited and relegated to fantasy the assumptions and *facts* which had formed the pillars of the justificatory discourse for the abhorrent labour exploitation, material dispossession and symbolic degradation as meted out to the masses in the preceding 100 years.



Even before the Moyne Commission entered the scene, the 'labour rebels' had ensured there would be shifts in elite thought with the shockwave they had sent throughout the country (Chapman, 1938a). By the end of the uprising, Governor Richards who had been intent on brutally disciplining labour (e.g. with the police force) had moved from the unequivocal defence of capital to creating an industrial tribunal that would resolve disputes in a way that enabled the "progress" of the "whole country" (Jamaica Gleaner, 1938b). The plea to those allying themselves to the masses was that labour should be organised not simply to "strengthen the position of those who demand more for particular groups; [since] the welfare of Jamaica as a whole is the all-important question" (Chapman, 1938b).

However, this was preaching to the converted. The labour leaders were already far along the road toward this emerging 'Jamaicanism'. For example, Norman Manley, an arbitrator on behalf of labour throughout the upheavals, in appealing to 2,000 striking longshoremen to accept a 2d<sup>18</sup> increase when their minimum demand was 4½d declared that if the companies are pushed too far "food in Jamaica is going to become more expensive" to which the crowd retorted, "we will get the money to buy the food". Manley then asked, "what about all the other people of the country whose wages will not go up as much?" and proposed that "there is a future, and labour in Jamaica has its responsibilities". Each of the many propositions and lengthy entreaties to accept the offer was repelled by cries of "No! No! No!" and "we would rather die!" (Jamaica Gleaner, 1938a). A clear focal point in the elite discourse on poverty was being shaped throughout the 1930s. The Quashee narrative – *they are poor because they are lazy* – was no longer

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<sup>18</sup> Jamaica used the British currency where a pound (£) often expressed as (l), was divided into shillings (s. or /-) and pennies (d).

appropriate. In the new poverty repertoire, both those arguing for increases in pay and better living conditions and those contending that sheer hard economic fact was the real dictator of wages, held the opinion that needs of the masses (and the price of their labour) were subsidiary to the interest of *Jamaica*.

One of the main proposals of the Moyne Commission was the development of trade unionism and other "means of increasing supervision over workers' recently discovered and powerful bargaining tool, the mass strike" (Bakan, 1990:125). There was an official consensus on the fact that, if poverty was caused by low pay and lack of jobs, then in the climate of economic depression, labourers could only extract a certain level of pay increase before the cost of production would rocket and destroy the country. However, there were counter-analyses for the masses to draw from. A worker who spoke during the strikes offered one of the rivalling interpretations of the economic situation:

Employers say they cannot pay us 1/- an hour, yet the other day they could pay the sailors 5/- an hour to land the cargo...Don't you see it is not the money they are afraid to spend, but because they don't want the negro to rise any higher in this island (Jamaica Gleaner, 1938a).

In Post's words, "the Jamaican poor had now forced themselves into the exchange of views" and were putting forward their own set of readings of the social order (Post, 1978:349). However, the contradictions of the labour rebellion coupled with the legitimacy granted to labour unions in their ambiguous role during the crisis saw to the rise of Bustamante and Manley as leaders of the masses. In the decades that followed, these men would dominate politics and develop means of regulating the demands of the labourers under their respective versions of the *national interest* and the *common good*.

Nourbese Philip (1992:75) noted that “in the history of Western thought – reflected in the language – labour and poverty belonged together”. Indeed, it is by examining the language used to characterise labourers that it has been possible to dig up the characterisations of poverty and the poor that have been passed on from generation to generation. The resonances from past ways of seeing remain in representations used by academics, ministers, teachers and other discourse producers. The style and content has changed radically; yet current official definitions are held together by retentions of the link between labour and the poor. This may be seen in the tendency to associate poverty with income and to separate the ‘able’ from the ‘unable’ and the ‘deserving’ from the ‘undeserving’ – a practice which encysts whole groups within essentialised imaginaries. But, perhaps the most resolute aspect of ways of seeing poverty as the concept that has travelled down through the centuries, is the propensity to view those identified as poor as a homogenised ‘class apart’ and to investigate and ‘program’ their relations as a fixed *condition*. This interpretation of historical and present events affirms the Rastafarian view of poverty as “a construct” within the “system of Babylon” that may be “mapped throughout history as a travelling torch of oppression” (Niaah, 2003:831).

### **3.3. Poverty as ‘Subsidiary’: The Incidental Place of Poverty Research in Early Caribbean Research (1938-1960)<sup>19</sup>**

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<sup>19</sup> The close historical and intellectual ties between the islands of the British Caribbean has meant that in examining scholarly representations in this and later sections, it would be inadequate to focus exclusively on Jamaican academic work. However, the emphasis throughout is on Jamaica.

Prior to the 1930s much of the writing and research on the Caribbean was done by self-taught persons or a few overseas based scholars, and as such the region's academic tradition could be considered relatively new (Boxill & McClean, 2002:176). Even the discipline of economics, regarded as one of the most developed areas of Caribbean scholarship, had its genesis only in the 1930s. Brown and Brewster (1974:48) posit that, in fact, "up to the 1940s the literature in the area was dominated by official reports of the UK government". However, since the formation of the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) in 1955, there has been an exponential growth of "serious systematic scholarly research on the social sciences" (Boxill & McClean, 2002:176).

Until recently, the theoretical and in particular, the policy engagement with poverty had been almost exclusively dominated by economists of different schools of thought, each postulating their preferred route to economic development that would in turn alleviate the conditions of impoverishment. What unites the various exponents of Caribbean economic thought, it has been argued, is their desire to "*explain and transform the social reality which has trapped the Caribbean people in poverty and backwardness*" (Bernal et al, 1984:5, emphasis added; Beckford, 1972; St. Cyr, 1991). An equally apposite observation made by Ahirom is that the "concentration on the process of overall growth – whether expressed in terms of total or of averages – has brought about *a certain neglect of the ultimate objective of this growth i.e. the wellbeing of the people in the growing and developing economies*" (1965:1, emphasis added). This diagnosis was delivered at a conference in 1964 – an intensely pyretic period in the region's history.<sup>20</sup> Yet, despite the political, economic and social vicissitudes the region and its

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<sup>20</sup> Tensions were again running high in the Caribbean as a result of the political and economic turmoil surrounding various decolonisation and nationalist movements. In 1962, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago declared their independence and between 1966 and 1983, nine other islands had gained independence from Britain (Barbados in

intelligentsia have been exposed to in the intervening years, Ahiram's (1965) proposition resonates with the assessment of numerous current observers who believe development is still too often equated with economic growth (Newman-Williams & Sabatini, 1997; Ramphall, 1997; Boxill & Mcclean, 2002).

There was however a sociological/anthropological interest in understanding lower-class culture in Jamaica and the Caribbean. In these works, poverty mainly emerged as a sub-text in discussions surrounding values and attitudes (Simpson, 1954; Knowles, 1956; Rodman, 1959), community/family organisation (Henriques, 1951; Smith, 1956; Braithwaite, 1953) and social/economic institutions (Katzin, 1960, 1959; Cumper, 1953; Mintz, 1955; Edwards, 1954). On one extreme, there were those studies that did not engage with the problem of poverty, but focused on the practices and characteristics of the poor (e.g., Simpson, 1954). On the other hand, there were researchers who explicitly declared institutions as their object, but would shed light on the livelihood strategies of the poor (e.g., Katzin, 1959, 1960). Ultimately, most of these studies of the poor or lower-class in the West Indies in this period fed into a discourse on the distinct cultural characteristics of poor communities in the western hemisphere and could be directly linked to the *Culture of Poverty* thesis (Brathwaite & Cole, 1978).<sup>21</sup>

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1966; the Bahamas in 1973; Grenada in 1974; Dominica in 1978; St. Lucia and St. Vincent & the Grenadines in 1979; Belize and Antigua & Barbuda in 1981; and St. Kitts & Nevis in 1983).

<sup>21</sup> The Culture of Poverty concept was developed in the USA during the 1960s primarily through the bestselling ethnographic realist publications of the cultural anthropologist Oscar Lewis. His work eloquently documented life histories of the urban poor and struck a nerve in identity politics that sparked a long running academic debate about how the poor should be represented (Bourgois, 2001). Goode (2002:282) has argued that the Culture of Poverty ideas "imply that since poverty is an intractable problem produced by inadequate individuals, there is nothing problematic about the political-economic structure itself".

While anthropologists and sociologists were engaged in much of the early writing about cultural aspects of poverty, it was the economists that dominated the West Indian academic and policy arenas. Accordingly, Osei (2001:234) has argued that "the intellectual foundations of poverty analysis in the Caribbean owe a lot to two protagonists", the leading economists Sir Arthur Lewis and George Beckford. Both Lewis and Beckford belong to a revered critical tradition that challenged the doctrines of the Neo-classical paradigm, which was the economic dogma inherited from colonial thinking (Bernal *et al*, 1984:7). Nevertheless, these two pioneers occupied antipodean positions with regard to the economic development of the Caribbean and the alleviation of poverty. The differences are best summarised in the words of Lewis himself, who proposed that:

The upward movement of those already on the escalator helps to pull more and more countries into the moving company...this proposition is not obvious, and its opposite, *that it is the enrichment of the rich that impoverishes the poor, is more widely held in one form or another* (Lewis quoted in, Girvan, 2005:205).

Put simply, Lewis thought it possible to overcome the underdevelopment problem (and by extension poverty) through a policy of increased trade interdependence of rich and poor nations, frequently referred to as *industrialisation by invitation*. By contrast, the Radical Caribbean School that arguably found its most prominent exponent in Beckford, viewed the Caribbean's dependence upon and the continued inequitable relationship with the advanced countries of the West, as part of the problem of poverty (Beckford, 1972:xviii).

Lewis and Beckford may have commented on the situation of the poor, but their respective works cannot be seen as directly addressing poverty as it affected individuals, communities, or groups (of class, race or gender). Lewis, for example, was clearly concerned with the poverty of countries and the region as a whole. In a quite munificent appraisal of the corpus of Lewis' economic

thought, Figueroa (2005:75) described him as an "honest elitist" and even though he was viewed as a staunch critic of Neo-classical economics, Lewis' (1958) own perspectives on development required that the wellbeing of individuals be secondary to the imperative of industrial profits and national economic growth. In keeping with this belief, he proposed the reduction of real wages in West Indian economies, "not by forcing down money wages but by raising the cost of living" pointing out that the "purpose of this would be to raise profits and so employment and [national] income, at the expense of reducing the standards of living of those who work" (Lewis, 1958:53; see also, Lewis, 1954).

The plantation/dependency theorists were far more sympathetic to the plight of the poor. Beckford declared his book, *Persistent Poverty*, to be primarily concerned with "the welfare of people living in plantation societies – why we are poor and what we can do about it" (Beckford, 1972:v). However, while the Beckford's plantation/dependency model may be seen as a thorough exposition on the causes of Caribbean underdevelopment and though he surveyed the *social costs of plantations* and their consequences for the poor, the usefulness of the theory "for explaining poverty is limited by its macro nature" (Brathwaite & Cole, 1978:90). Like Lewis, Beckford and other adherents to the radical paradigm, most Caribbean scholars were focused on the causes of and possible solutions to underdevelopment, not the issues faced by those struggling with it.

From a position of dominance, by the late 1950s the currents of social and economic change had made the structure of national and international economies an almost exclusive research interest in the region (Carnegie, 1992:13). This left investigations of microscopic details clouded in the shadows of *the big picture*. The conclusion that academics working on the Caribbean up to 1960

had scorned the direct theorisation of poverty is unavoidable. In early sociological and anthropological studies a contradictory pattern had emerged where those professing to deal with the issues of the poor/lower-class were more concerned with understanding values and interpreting behaviours. It was those concerned with specific institutions who frequently provided useful insights about the strategies of the poor and their social conditions. By being trapped in these analytical practices, Caribbean Anthropology at this stage could be characterised as "a discipline focusing almost blindly on culture to the exclusion of poverty" (Chevannes, 1989:1). At the same time, the most prominent economists, supposedly researching and charting Caribbean development, were too obsessed with the macro-economic picture and a philosophy of growth to notice the day-to-day hardships being faced by the majority of the population. While there were those who explored issues surrounding poverty, this was not with the intention of understanding the phenomena itself, but in an effort to increase productivity (Cumper, 1953). As a result, the information on poverty that has been gleaned from the literature can be seen as a research "by-product" or the residuum of larger theoretical concerns.

### **3.4. Necessity as the Mother of Research: Social Discontent, Basic Needs and the Poverty Line (1960 -1990)**

Reflected in the research of the 1960s, was the fact that the young social scientists of the region "had breathed deeply the heady air of Caribbean nationalism...and had become both intoxicated and entrapped" (Carnegie, 1992:13). The temperament of the times was captured in a speech by Norman Manley, as Premier of Jamaica. Manley inveighed against the growing resistance to national and economic development and saw the philosophical opposition to elite notions of progress as articulated through radical Rastafarian and pan-Africanist ideas as "a problem of a



grave magnitude" (Jamaica Gleaner, 1960). He contended that since independence there was more money and "a greater growth of the economy. But there are thousands of people that don't touch. And the more they see the good grow the more they ask themselves the question, what about me? What about little me?" The argument was that all was well when everybody was poor "but the moment you start to change, you watch yourself" (Jamaica Gleaner, 1960).

Jamaica in the early sixties was changing rapidly and there was a clear lessening of inequalities in human rights, but it was also "clearly evident that gross inequalities of opportunity and achievement are widespread" (Mau, 1965:259). The scholastic and policy moods leading up to independence in 1962 were dominated by a moribund obsession with economic growth and national development. There was to be however, a major scholastic turn in the late 1960s to early 1970s. This was prompted by popular discontent, and given impetus by the efforts of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to develop a platform for the "satisfaction of the basic needs of each country's population" (Standing & Szal, 1979:V).

According to Bernal *et al*, (1984:59) the events of the 1960s had demonstrated the inadequacy of the traditional economic policies in the Caribbean and the desperate socio-economic climate they created caused numerous socio-political upheavals. These included: the Henry Rebellion of 1960; the Coral Gardens 'Uprising' of 1963; the Anti-Chinese Riots of 1965; the political warfare and state of emergency in 1966-1967; and the Rodney Riots in October 1968 (Lacey, 1977:82). Two of these episodes – the Henry Rebellion and the Rodney Riots – fractured the political and academic solace in nationalism and economic growth by forcing them to examine more closely the sufferings of those being left behind in the insatiable quest for *development*. Like the 1865 and 1938 rebellions, these upheavals were not significant in themselves as incidents of violence

(the political violence of the period saw to many more deaths). Rather, their symbolic content or the meanings given to these events stood as verdicts on the reigning social order and demanded reflection. Specifically, the riots had succeeded in instilling "real fear and paranoia" in "official Jamaica" (Meeks, 2000:46). Indeed, they were particularly frightening "because they manifested a reservoir of antagonism against the Jamaican government and the national bourgeoisie" which operated outside the party political sphere of violence (Lacey, 1977:82; Rodney, 1969:65-66; Jamaica Gleaner, 1968a).

The troubles had not been isolated to Jamaica, both Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago would have their own riots. They precipitated a region-wide political and academic awakening to the realities and living conditions of the masses. As seen in Harewood's (1977:150) perusal of national 5 year plans from around 1970-1975, Commonwealth Caribbean governments were scrambling to demonstrate that top priority was being given to efforts aimed at reducing income inequalities and removing social and institutional barriers which had handicapped the under-privileged. In Jamaica, during and after the Rodney Riots, there were calls from the business community for a 1938-style official commission of inquiry into the living conditions in the country (Jamaica Gleaner, 1968b) and the Council of Church leaders announced "we have been made painfully aware of our divisions" (Jamaica Council of Churches, 1968). The academic community duly followed course and from this point on, for better or for worse, the lower-class/working class research would gradually fade away, to be replaced by studies of the poor. The masses as a group of people colloquially referred to as the *poor man*, the *small man*, the *sufferer*, or the *likkle*

*man* would now be subjected to intense scholarly (re)programming – the process of constructing an official poverty domain or what may be called *pooring*.<sup>22</sup>

A consensus of sorts had emerged around the buzzword of *basic needs*, from the Democratic Socialism of Jamaica to the Co-operative Socialism of Guyana, and at least in rhetoric, the fulfilment of human needs of all citizens was seen as a minimal requirement of government. The problem, it was claimed, was that there was no systematic knowledge of who was in need and exactly how many poor there were. In this context, Michael Manley was elected as Prime Minister of Jamaica following the 1972 general elections, with an overwhelming majority and a mandate to promote social change, especially by reducing the gross social and economic imbalances that permeated the society (Smith, 1982). In 1974, he commissioned renowned social anthropologist, M. G. Smith, to conduct a sample survey so as to estimate "the annual volume of individual and family needs for social assistance of all kinds that seemed relevant and legitimate" (Smith, 1983:40; see also, Smith, 1982 & 1989). The research was policy oriented and conceptually tailored to meet a political goal. Even so, Smith was able to release a number of publications (including a book titled, *Poverty in Jamaica*) which were based on the data from the 1974-75 survey. However, it was always made clear that the research was aimed at defining only those social needs that *could* and *should* be the concern of government, rather than conceptualising or measuring the extent of poverty itself.

Smith's work constituted an important step, but the earliest academic attempts at conceptually clarifying and formally quantifying poverty for Caribbean countries would follow on the heels of his

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<sup>22</sup> For an interviewee's allusion to these processes, see page 206.

preliminary survey. The first was undertaken by Ralph Henry in 1975, who used the nutritional components of the various food items consumed in each Caribbean country to arrive at a "least cost" subsistence diet for Trinidad & Tobago (Harewood & Henry, 1978:7). The subsistence diet combined with allowances for housing, light and fuel, clothing, transport and education, was used to determine an *absolute* poverty line (Harewood & Henry, 1978). In Guyana, the National Food and Nutrition survey undertaken by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) conducted field work from April to June 1971. The information collected was used to publish a report in 1976 that has been described as providing "a minimally acceptable level of data on poverty" (Thomas, 1993:11).

In Jamaica, while Boyd (1988) had attempted to calculate the impact of economic policies on child poverty, Derek Gordon (1989) under the auspices of the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ), is recognised as being the first to develop a method to systematically measure absolute poverty. This effort would continually be improved upon and refined by the work of practitioners at the PIOJ and scholars at the University of the West Indies (UWI) (Henry-Lee, 2001; Osei, 2001). An interesting (and perhaps contradictory) innovation came in 1996 with the introduction of the first poverty map for Jamaica which sought to identify and rank those communities with the highest concentration of poverty incidents based on water supply, toilet facilities, unemployment and education (Planning Institute of Jamaica & United Nations Development Programme, 2000; Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2008).

Absolute poverty lines are viewed as intrinsically axiomatic by many. Thus, Gordon (1989:2) declared, following Sen, that even the most staunch relativist would agree to there being, at some level, "an irreducible core of absolute deprivation in the concept of poverty". The corollary here

which has reverberated throughout Caribbean research for decades is that, the poverty line data forms a sort of universally acceptable *first principle* or *meta-knowledge* foundation upon which all theoretical positions can build. The commixed views of the majority of scholars from disparate schools of thought had reified the doctrine that poverty could be defined entirely in monetary/consumption terms and alleviated through job creation. The initial basic needs approach as expressed in the socialist rhetoric of some West Indian governments of the 1970s was bedevilled by many of the same issues. But for all its problems (and it had many), it was inclusive in that it sought to capture *all* those within the population who could not access *all* the necessities a human being required for survival. The poverty line construct has no such objective. On the contrary, it is explicitly designed to ignore the fact that individuals and households can lack multiple needs and still be classified as non-poor (Anderson, 2000). This reveals a definitional predilection towards creating a consensus poverty category at the nadir of human survival. The strategic marginalisation of the non-poor that are in need and their corresponding neglect in research and policy is justified by their perceived unwillingness to consume in a way that experts have determined they should.

The period from 1938 to 1990 was characterised by the *idée fixe* of economic/industrial growth as national development. The policies developed through this philosophy exacerbated already entrenched racial and socio-economic injustices and led to riots across the region. As a reaction to the upheavals of the period and to the palpable neglect of the masses, scientific research was conscripted to inform policy on identifying those that lacked their basic needs. However, due to political and economic exigencies, the impulse to assist all those who lacked basic needs fell out of the governmental and academic purview to be replaced by a category of individuals deemed "absolutely poor". This group, drawn from the masses suffering different levels and types of

deprivation, were defined, measured and assisted on the premise of a supposedly objective standard. The malignant scoria that is the preserve of this tradition attempts to erase difference and much needed theoretical malleability from the research on poverty, as if the generation of the poor via the machinations of a poverty line were a neutral and apolitical exercise.

### **3.5. Conceptual Retrenchment and Qualitative Expansion: Conflicts, Contradictions and Compromises in Changing Poverty Approaches (1990 - Current)**

#### **3.5.1 Targeting Adjustments to/on Poverty**

Jamaica signed its first standby agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1977. Over the 18 years that followed, 10 agreements were concluded with the IMF and 3 separate structural adjustment programmes were implemented (Handa & King, 1997:916). According to Holland, the authors of the structural adjustment process had calculated that “in order to achieve long-term sustainable growth with redistribution, *short-term intensification of poverty in Third World countries must be accepted*, with some attempts to mitigate it” (1994:645, emphasis added). As the predicted and deliberate intensification of processes of deprivation unfolded over the 1980s into the 1990s, research in the social sciences was being fuelled by a local and international appetite for more detailed information on the *vulnerable* sections of society – the ‘poorest’ and particularly ‘at risk’ groups within the poor.

The World Development Report of 1990 which “re-examines how policy can help reduce poverty and explores the prospects for the poor during the 1990s” (World Bank, 1990:2) was the Bank’s official reinvestment into the anti-poverty enterprise and it set in motion a flurry of activity in the

field. The World Development Report of 1980 had acknowledged some countries may find it more difficult to adjust in the 1980s than they had in the period from 1974-1978 and had provided several pieces of evidence to demonstrate why this unfortunate outcome was likely (World Bank, 1980:5). It was nevertheless posited that "*successful adjustment* should not *unduly* sacrifice either the current living standards of the poor or the measures needed now to reduce poverty" (World Bank, 1980:iii, emphasis added). The verdict on the success of adjustment was returned in 1990. It was found that "when structural adjustment issues came to the fore, little attention was paid to the effects on the poor". Poverty was neglected since there was an expectation of rapid transition to new growth, but as the decade continued, it became clear that macroeconomic recovery was "slow in coming" (World Bank, 1990:103). For Jamaica, sustained recovery would not come at all,<sup>23</sup> instead it was one of those nations where the depressing "evidence of the declines in incomes and cutbacks in services began to mount" (World Bank, 1990:103).

Caribbean research, it seems, began to operate its own system of triage. Academia was apparently responding to the fact that both the universal fulfilment of basic needs and the drive towards equitable income distribution had been jettisoned as the desiderata of Caribbean politicians in the wake of putative economic necessities. This conclusive shift towards a narrow targeting of specific groups paradoxically coincided with the Jamaican Government's 1995 inspirational affirmation of "its commitment to eradicate poverty" through the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP) (Jamaican Ministry of Land and Environment, 2003:12; see also, Government of Jamaica, 1997). The Jamaican Government was vowing to bravely do what very few (if any) governments had done before, that is, reduce the incidence of poverty (as officially

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<sup>23</sup> GDP figures between 1981 and 1989 in Handa and King (1997:917) show an annual growth rate of 1.5%. The period was characterised by fluctuation and an inability to sustain increases (which nevertheless serve to hide widening social and economic inequalities).

defined) within a rapidly declining economy. But this pioneering plan of action was riddled with crippling ideological and programmatic contradictions (Osei, 2002; Anderson, 2001; Le Franc & Downes, 2001).

In relation to the discourses being used, policy-makers and academics researching poverty issues were making ambiguous (or perhaps surreptitious) use of the terms reduction, eradication and alleviation. This is problematic since, poverty alleviation refers to efforts to ease or ameliorate consumption and other material hardships faced by individuals and households, while poverty reduction speaks to efforts aimed at "improving the capability of the poor to lift themselves out of poverty," thereby lessening in real terms the number of impoverished individuals in a society (Henry & Mondesire, 1997:102). On the other hand, policies of poverty eradication are those aimed essentially at the complete erasure of poverty (as defined in the given context) from a society. Therefore, policies of alleviation or reduction may be part of a wider strategy of eradication, but none of the terms are synonymous. Notwithstanding the bold proclamations that rang throughout official government documents, a number of examinations have shown that the inchoate potpourri which constitutes the government's endeavour at a "comprehensive" attack on poverty (even within its very limited definitional frame) is little more than a coping mechanism for the very few who are able to access state help (Anderson, 2001; Ezemenari & Subbaroa, 1999; Osei, 2002). As a result, all three terms when mobilised to interpret the Jamaican context would at best read: the NPEP aimed to *eradicate* poverty over time by implementing *reduction* programmes which barely *alleviated* the problem.

Even as the field of poverty was narrowing in terms of the policy remit, and even as many intellectuals responded by compliantly restricting their focus, there was an emerging call for



investigative depth through qualitative methods. Research in this direction was being encouraged through the funding and policy responses from local and international institutions. This development served as a catalyst for an extremely intense period of investigation on issues relating to poverty. Yet, the surge that was to occur would be fundamentally different from the numerous other research spasms that occurred in the paroxysmal history of investigations into poverty in Jamaica. Firstly, a new methodological convention on poverty was to develop (influenced by Robert Chambers’ work on participation), that would seek to directly represent the views of the poor and thereby ‘humanise’ the arid quantitative assessments that had, up to this point, dominated research. Secondly, an increasingly sceptical position was being held on the methodological validity/reliability of the results from studies of absolute poverty and cognate measures by authors from otherwise orthodox standpoints.

### **3.5.2 Participation as Eucharist: Methodological Shift and Conceptual Obstinace**

At the 1995 Caribbean Symposium on Social Sector Policy and Research Issues which was organised in response to commitments made at the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, the Prime Minister of Barbados stated:

The brutal fact is that after nearly fifty years of attempts at state sponsored social engineering informed by social science, the problem of world poverty is now much more massive and seemingly more intractable than before (Arthur, 1995:x).

These sentiments seemed to have heralded, on the part of scholars and politicians of the region, a determination to reinvent “poverty eradication” as the number one goal on national agendas. Blackman from the Ministry of Social Transformation in Barbados described the international and regional summits around 1995 and 1996 as causing a “paradigm shift” which reshaped her government’s definition and response to poverty within a participatory framework (Blackman,

2006). In Jamaica, an almost identical transformation was unfolding; as is noticeable from the government's claim that the NPEP had participation as one of its "guiding principles" (Government of Jamaica, 1997).

Two distinct branches of practice are identifiable in most participatory incursions in Caribbean and Jamaican poverty. First, there is the inclination to integrate an inelastic poverty line definition into the participatory methodology which would seem to demand adaptability and constant interactive reflection. This is essentially a futile and facile attempt to combine two diametrically opposed forces.<sup>24</sup> The practicalities of fieldwork demand that most researchers, and particularly those engaged in sector or community based studies, select as participants individuals who may be deprived, but nevertheless above the poverty line (thus non-poor). In practice, therefore, these studies necessarily operate within a fairly broad concept of poverty; yet the operational extensions of the definition are not made to colour (nor are they ever coloured by) the pre-determined notion of who is poor/non-poor that underpins the researcher's understanding. Instead, it is as if the different conceptualisations are perfectly aligned and complementary. Douglas Rickets, for example, after describing the macro-economic structure and determining that 11.9% of Free Zone workers in Jamaica lived below the poverty line, went on to adopt a qualitative methodology as it provided "comprehensive and detailed data that would complement existing quantitative data" since "*there are certain gaps quantitative data cannot fill*" (Douglas Rickets, 2002:132, emphasis added; for other cases see, Clarke, 2002; Henry-Lee, 2002).

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that quantitative and qualitative methods are necessarily incompatible and both have been combined to good effect within Caribbean research before. An example may be found in Anderson's (1987) exceptional exposition of the urban informal transport system in Kingston. The point here is that attempts to use participatory methods in examining issues of poverty with a static and abstract predetermined definition of poverty are intrinsically contradictory.

A second direction in the application of participatory methods is to distance the investigation, at the outset, from an institutional/ideological allegiance to absolute poverty. Yet, even this ostensibly less problematic approach is debilitated by intrinsic incongruities and equivocalities. In many cases academics claim to have directly connected with, elicited and (re)presented the views of the poor on poverty. This then, allows for self definition in deprived communities and groups, and facilitates the creation of narratives which are in turn used to characterise *the condition of poverty* (Frank, 2007). Undoubtedly, much of this work contributed to improvements in recognising and understanding some of the sufferings people experience within relations of deprivation, but how far has it moved the conceptualisation of poverty from the orthodox absolute position? And, how far does it (or can it) push the policy framework beyond the very confined limits that have been set by dominant concepts? It is important to reflect on these questions by critically interrogating the rhetoric and results of this kind of research.

The direct question may be asked: can the views of the participants change/influence a researcher's ideas on poverty through orthodox participatory research in Jamaica? Grant and Shillito (2002) provide a key example of the obstinance of preconceived notions. After presenting community and individual views on a panoply of issues throughout the paper, the authors betray their theoretical bias by concluding: "despite slow economic growth, Jamaica has reduced poverty. The strong public commitment to more equitable development in Jamaica is matched by numerous government initiatives aimed at reducing poverty". Some of the voices of the poor had been much more pessimistic but they did not influence the authors' determinations. For instance, it was reported that "discussion groups across the study communities unanimously agree that economic opportunities have declined over the last twenty years and especially over the last

decade" (Grant & Shillito, 2002:432). In fact, the researchers' conclusion directly contradicts a participant's statement that:

*System is in place but not for poor people. All we can do is block roads and sometimes people get arrested and go to jail when they protest, so nothing good comes of it (2002:435, emphasis added).*

A reader of the material who is attempting to understand the extent of poverty and the commitment by government to assist the poor, has to make a choice between which of the reports to believe: the 'hard' facts or the subjective views of the poor. However since the experts who speak for/on behalf of the poor affirm the former, it begs the question, is there a choice here at all?

While many have attempted to inject rich and inclusive content to the esotericism of the orthodox poverty construct, others have declared a more complete eschewal of the orthodox modes of conceptualisation by looking to the poor themselves for a definition. Yet, as they are predominantly practiced in the Caribbean, in both of these designs participation has been little more than a Eucharist which provides researchers with absolution for the transgressions of their commitment to the intuitively inane (in its conceptual/definitional application) poverty line abstraction. Neither contemplates using their data to reflect upon the boundaries of their own presuppositions and their own purposes. Lister's (2004:4) general observation holds true in the Caribbean context, as it is indeed, "the understanding held by more powerful groups, rather than by those who experience poverty, which are reflected in dominant conceptualisations".

### **3.6. Poverty as "Suffering": The Conceptual Return of *Anthropos* (1975-Current)**

In her exceptional examination of Jamaican *Yards*, Brodber, (1975) postulated that the researched individuals' opinions on their struggles, their suffering and their ways of handling hardship were invaluable since the information drawn from such investigations contained viable autochthonous strategies which could be integrated into social policy. In addition, Brodber throughout the text alluded to methodological principles which would benefit future research into the issues surrounding the deprivation of the masses in Jamaica. One of these was in relation to the "project's guiding principle of co-operation" which had as its short term goal the opening up "of avenues of communication" so as to gain the kind of data that would aid in understanding individual problems and in finding solutions. The long term goal of Brodber's research "co-operation" was meant "to establish the bases for identification of Jamaica's social problems" (Brodber, 1975:69-70). In this sense, the aim was not the objectification of the persons, conditions or relations being examined, but the objectification of the social history that gives rise to identifiable phenomena.<sup>25</sup>

On the heels of Brodber's *sketch* and in a context where intellectuals of the region were busily sharpening their investigative tools and refining their conceptual approaches (e.g. Smith in 1974 or Harewood & Henry in 1978), Brathwaite and Cole (1978) contributed their own tentative program for research into poverty. As early as the 1970s, these authors recognised the malaise which has only intensified through the decades and is one of the fundamental concerns of this thesis: "*a major problem in poverty research is the way in which we conceptualise poverty*" (1978:91, emphasis added). As correctives, they proposed: (i) the creation of a method of identification so that "the poor can be treated not as a homogeneous mass but as groups of

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<sup>25</sup> Brodber's examination of Yards is explored in greater detail in the introduction of Chapter 6.

persons in varying degrees of poverty"; (ii) that this method should be used for both inter and intra territorial comparisons as well as in analysis of the changes in the dynamics of poverty over time; and (iii) the deployment of an interdisciplinary programme, within which sociology would be vital "in enabling us to identify structural conditions in society which conduce to poverty" (1978:91-92).

On the margins of scholarly practice there was a vibrant alternative tradition of investigation that could be aligned to projects outlined above. In many ways, they formed radical departures from the orthodox ways of seeing. These marginal examinations of poverty were in a sense an anthropocentric response to the apparently new forms of deprivation which could not be satisfactorily represented through statistical and static analyses. Of particular interest were the increasingly enervative austerity programmes introduced under the auspices of the IMF. One consequence of these programmes was slowly becoming obvious to some academics and other social commentators. That is, women, as the object of policy, were disproportionately deprived by the economic manoeuvrings. Indeed, under the structural adjustment measures imposed upon the Jamaican government during the 1970s a strategic decision was made to force women to enter the labour force in an exercise that was a levelling down of gender inequality in the labour market (Holland, 1995:477).

Women's participation did rise during adjustment and long after the policies had been implemented, it continued to rise at a far higher rate than men (St. Hill, 2001). However, the nature of the increased female presence and its implications would not be conducive to any well considered anti-poverty strategy (Antrobus, 1993). On the contrary, rather than combating social suffering, there was a carefully calculated design to economically engineer economic and social deprivation – reminiscent of the "*artificial poverty*" dispensed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Jamaica – so as to generate and command labour. As a response to the social, cultural and economic restructuring

that was taking place, feminists and those concerned with women's studies moved beyond debates on the status and roles of women in the West Indies to critically consider the consequences and the viscera of the structural changes occurring in society. In so doing, they inadvertently mapped out a terrain through which an alternative conceptualisation of the poor could be arrived at. Therefore, in the 1980s and early 1990s the relationship between adjustment and women became a very fertile area of research. Notable publications spanned the region and included: Bolles (1983, 1991), Harrison (1988), Antrobus (1989), Safa (1989) and Messiah (1989).

Bolles (1991) in her article, *Surviving Manley and Seaga*, adopted an approach that was generally emblematic of much of the feminist studies of the period. She presented four life history accounts of women's differentiated struggles through the punishing economic changes. The adhesive element for Bolles was the cruel asphyxiation of these women's opportunities for, among other things, employment, housing and access to social services. The income of women is highlighted but their poverty is not defined by it. Instead, the "back against the wall" narrative was central to the designation of these women as poor. In other studies common experiences of "sufferation" and "downpression" became the indicators of poverty (Harrison, 1988). Closely aligned to these unorthodox conceptualisations is Antrobus' observation that "women's resourcefulness in times of crisis – their willingness and ability to cope, to make ends meet, to make whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to ensure the survival of their family" has been a part of the history of the region. The dependence on the exploitation of women, she argues, perpetuates the conditions which have prevented the full development of the Caribbean and indeed, sustained the continued impoverishment of its peoples (Antrobus, 1989:26).

Quite frequently, the ethnographic material presented in these studies would be supplemented by quantitative data. In fact, it would be rare not to find statistics which served to contextualise the insights drawn from the women interviewed (see for e.g., Harrison, 1988; Bolles, 1991). Therefore, the feminist approach was not necessarily set in direct opposition to the more orthodox perspective of poverty. However, it is being argued here, that those studies which focus on human suffering within relations of deprivation have formed and continue to form a veritable alternative perspective for two reasons. Firstly, because they, at least initially, were predominantly connected to the feminist movement, the definitions of the poor do not present themselves as 'value free'. Instead, even where conventional poverty figures are used, the weight of a feminist position imposed a broader interpretation of poverty. Secondly, the concomitant emphasis on the experiences of women (including the narratives of "sufferation" (Harrison, 1988), "life struggle" (Barrow, 1986) or the "back against the wall" (Bolles, 1991)) provides a powerful popular valence and rescues the analyses from the morbid esotericism of the absolute poverty concoction.

During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s feminist explorations of the struggles and suffering of 'poor people' would become a central medium through which a less arcane perspective on poverty would materialise. Nevertheless, this 'tradition' was not the only detractor from the dominant mode of thought. As early as the 1960s, across a diverse range of disciplines and subjects of interest, numerous academics interpreted and represented poverty as *the deprived masses* and either directly or indirectly impeached what was described by Ramphall (1994:48) as the "productivist conceptualisation of poverty". Notably, these included: Rodney (1969), Johnson (1976), Campbell (1980, 1985), Gray (1994) and Ramphall (1994, 1997). Thus, feminism was not the only source of alternatives operating in the academic context, and yet the response of feminists to the consequences of structural adjustment has been highlighted as a decisive



challenge to the dominant poverty construct. This is because there was a consistent narrative pattern analogous to a conceptualisation that tied these works together. Also, despite the lack of direct theoretical engagement with who is poor/non-poor, it can be argued that a general understanding of the poor may be easily inferred from the research (emphasis was placed on researching informal traders, unemployed or low paid women who form a substantial part of the deprived masses (for e.g., Harrison, 1988:103)). There was an undeniably attractive inclusivity in this approach. However, the catholicity and lack of direct engagement limits the possibilities of what may be understood from references to a 'poverty phenomenon' and the questions remain: by what criteria is the poor to be distinguished from the non-poor? And furthermore, how should poverty be *properly* conceptualised and defined for everyday usage and/or policy?

More recently there has been a growing body of investigations delineating people's experiences with deprivation, many of these outside the feminist tradition, which have also indirectly contested the utility of the poverty orthodoxy by refusing to engage with it in their scholarly expositions. These representations contain the more fluid social, cultural and economic conceptualisation of poverty which draws on discourses used by various deprived and marginalised groups (Sistren & Ford-Smith, 2005; Niaah, 2003; Hope, 2004; Kretsedemas, 1997; Buffonge, 2001). From this, it may be posited that an obstinate antinomy exists between the *economist* characterisation of the poor as a group subsisting on a particular income, and the *sufferist* exposure of the *gritty realities* of the deprived masses. Ultimately, this chasm means that the income/consumption apparatus mobilised by policymakers and 'mainstream' theorists to conceptualise and measure poverty, is almost completely alien to some of the most insightful discussions on the lived experiences of the poor in Jamaica and other areas of the Caribbean.

While it has been possible to extrapolate an alternative conceptualisation of poverty from the aforementioned studies, they provide little by way of a definition, where a definition “should provide more precise statements on what distinguishes the state of poverty and of being poor from that of not being in poverty/poor” (Lister, 2004:4). The caveat here is that this critique is based on a somewhat unmerited (and perhaps unfair) expectation that researchers extend themselves into a muddled debate that is not necessarily their primary concern. In most cases the works referred to above, did not claim to be examining poverty as such, but rather the lives, livelihoods and/or struggles of poor groups. Even so, the lack of a definition or clear frames through which to distinguish the poor from the non-poor has severely punctured the viability of this anthropocentric branch of feminist research as a direct approach to poverty.

Attempts to ascribe strict and pre-determined values to the poor seem to be vitiated by the elusive and variable nature of how those who struggle with extreme deprivation conceive of their experiences. However, academia needs definitions and ways of making distinctions. If a veritable commitment to poverty reduction/eradication is to be formulated, the associated approach must go beyond popular conceptualisations (which are always themselves contested and ambiguous) and postulate methods to enhance the perceptibility of at least some of the permutations and parameters of the object of investigation. What is at issue in this thesis is not whether some relations of deprivation should be defined as poverty, but what definitions say about the deprived (both those included and excluded in the parameters) and the implications for their lives.

### **3.7. “Who Feels it *Knows!*”: Popular Resistance Inside Jamaica’s *Poverty (Lab)oratory***

It has been posited that the various conniptions of the downpressed masses in the 1860s, 1930s and 1960s awakened academic and political consciences to the social and economic hardships being faced. However, quite quickly the experiences of need, hardship and suffering were theoretically divorced from poverty and replaced by calculations of minimum earnings, consumption and expenditure. This section conducts an examination of the popular discourses on poverty from which it is possible to encounter some elements of the vocabulary used to interpret the form of social suffering being investigated in this thesis.

Recent studies, even those with a quantitative proclivity, have sought to adopt participatory principles in research and yet, as posited previously, poverty remains conceptually intransigent. This reflects an entropic state of affairs in academia where the Caribbean intellectual may be seen as guilty of erecting an insuperable barrier between "local knowledge" and scientific fact (even when the latter is believed to be a product of the former). As a result, a concept emerging from the annals of scholarly practice that has been certified as rational and empirical, usually far outweighs any "pearls of wisdom" that can be gathered from popular discourses. In one of the groundbreaking participatory publications on the connection between urban poverty and violence in Jamaica, for instance, participants in a focus group are reported to have declared that every one in their community was poor. They claimed "we all poor, but we no poverty" and they "were reluctant to put people in different categories" (Moser & Holland, 1997:5). The resistance of the participants was broken when they were "questioned closely" and they eventually came up with the categories "have it" and "don't have it".

The point here is not that every single person in the community should have been unquestioningly designated as poor because the participants said so, but that there should have

been an immediate recognition of a distinct opposition between the researchers' and the respondents' views on poverty and a consideration of the academic value of the latter. In the end, the focus group had yielded to the researchers' perspective and as such, there was no need to problematise the dominant perceptions with Delphic questions such as: are there significant differences between the two opinions on poverty? If so, what specifically are they? Can there be empirically verifiable truths to the statement that "everyone in the community is poor"? And importantly, could the participants' views be more beneficial than the researchers' perspective in the context of the research? By refusing to engage with these admittedly difficult questions, like others before, the study ignores the prescience of an old Jamaican aphorism: *sense mek before book*.<sup>26</sup> In this case, the commitment to scientific facts displaced the local knowledge or commonsense, which might have made an invaluable contribution to the analyses and programmatic results of the research.

When investigating issues such as violence or political apathy it would be valuable to understand how a shared sense of neglect as a result of perceived *poli-tricks* can breed disaffection to widely held societal codes (Gray, 2004). The use of blunt theoretical concepts means that even where there has been fastidious application of methods, opportunities for exploring untraveled academic terrain are missed. As illustrated in the geographical concentration of incidents of extreme deprivation (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2008), experiences of need and "having to suck salt through wooden spoon"<sup>27</sup> have a kind of ubiquity in some Jamaican localities. Very telling names have been given to urban slums and rural areas across the country such as: Sufferer's Heights,

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<sup>26</sup> "Sense mek before book" translates to "knowledge existed before it could be published in book form", suggesting that intelligence predates and may supersede academic knowledge.

<sup>27</sup> "Suck salt through wooden spoon" is a saying expressing almost intolerable hardship that elicits the image of a person so desperate and in need that their only recourse to gain some sustenance is to eat salt from a wooden spoon.

Pain Land, Labour-in-Vain, Swine Lane, or Back o' Wall. The researcher who selects such a community and then asks the residents to identify the non-poor who live in those inhospitable conditions may understandably find stubborn resistance.

Even if it could be accepted without further qualification that local conceptualisations which delineate who is poor are *inaccurate*, it would still be advantageous to explore these folk ideas of poverty as individuals make sense of their life experiences through their understandings of the world. Accordingly, Kretsedemas (1997), in discussing talk radio, public discourse and the politics of the poor, saw the need to:

Come to terms with the ways in which concepts like "the working class", "the poor", "the majority population", "the black population", and "popular opinion" were themselves used as discursive frames that discussants used to *construct their own personal and group identities* (1997:204).

Despite the general academic aversion to folk wisdom, local views of poverty do find ways of exerting themselves on the Jamaican consciousness. Perhaps the most effective dispensaries for the instruments Jamaicans use to interpret and represent their lives may be the mundane occurrences which later come to resonate with the living experiences (e.g. the adages in the occasional talk with the grandparents, the *sankeys* (folksongs) or the stories told at 'nine nights'). But they are also routinely transmitted through the vast range of cultural forms and forums of self-expression and self-exploration which exist in Jamaica. These include an extremely "strong tradition of community dance and drama as an expression of social concern and social vision" (Ford-Smith, 1995:148) as well as an incomparable<sup>28</sup> music industry that "embodies the historical experience of the Jamaican masses – it reflects and in reflecting it reveals the contemporary situation of the nation" (Johnson, 1976:398).

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<sup>28</sup> Oumano (1997:33) has noted that "no other country on the globe churns out as much recorded music per capita".

George Beckford, a paragon of critical Caribbean thought, has documented one of his encounters with the latent knowledge that often strikes the consciousness in strange ways. While driving to Kingston and discussing "life on *the rock*" with two friends, Beckford recalls his friend's usage of the old maxim, "*small garden, bitter weed*" (Beckford & Witter, 1982:xvii). This was a statement made in passing and yet, it immediately gave an expressive form to Beckford's understanding of Jamaica's social condition and became the title of his joint publication with Witter. The texture and taste of the suffering in the past and present are entangled with memories of pain and triumph. These get bundled into everyday exchanges and find interesting ways of carving themselves into the language used to describe experiences. Some of the apothecaries of popular knowledge are explored below.

### **3.7.1 The Rebellious Oratory of "The Earth Most Strongest Man"**

While interviewing and "empathising" with persons from the "second generation of freed men," Brodber, through the airwaves, heard the voice of Burning Spear ask: "do you remember the days of slavery? Do you remember the days of slavery?" She recalls that "it was as if a river of sentiment that had been running underground for decades had surfaced" (Brodber, 1985:146). The sounds that shook Brodber and her colleagues came from the cultural resurgence of the Rastafarian movement which had made one of its ultimate goals teaching the truth and thereby allowing *emancipation from mental slavery*. Through speaking, singing, drumming as well as wearing of resistance (in clothes, dreadlocks and mannerism), Rastafarians have been

instrumental in reinterpreting poverty in Jamaica and in awakening a latent language to spot and stain downpression<sup>29</sup> and dispossession.

The Rastafari made a determined effort to break with the "sophistry of the English culture of Jamaica". Many at first attempted to learn Amharic (an Ethiopian language) but were unsuccessful in spreading it widely, and therefore, through a slow process developed "expressions to form a language which reflected their solidarity, self-reliance and Africanness" (Campbell, 1985:124). They saw themselves, to use Noubese Philip's (1992:77) words, "as nurtured on the bile of a colonial language" and "could see no way around the language, only through it, challenging the mystification and half truths at its core". Inasmuch as English is both a sign of colonial suffering and a potentially emancipatory site of resistance, the Rastafarian *thoughtist*, Planno (1995:37), in his treatise on the philosophy of the movement, *The Earth Most Strongest Man*, described poverty as "both a sin and a crime", but argued that "poverty also exposes the dignity of man".

It is from this legacy of cultural rebellion that Niah's (2003:827) extremely incisive reading of Jamaica as a multiple *Poverty Laboratory* has emerged. The concept deconstructs the island as a British experiment in the production of poverty where a sophisticated (*Lab*)-*oratory* was developed and furnished with equipments, chemicals, laws and formulae for a "well-crafted system of empire building for Europe" (2003:827). As such, Jamaica's history from "the post-emancipation period up to the present may be written in terms of a struggle by a culturally

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<sup>29</sup> "Downpression" is a term of Rastafarian origin used instead of "oppression". The prefix "op", at least in sound, mirrors the positive term "up" and since the belief is that there is nothing positive about being exploited and abused the prefix "down" replaces "op", creating the conjugations – "downpressing", "downpressor", *etc.*

economically and dispossessed people to liberate themselves" (2003:826). This struggle through *sufferation*<sup>30</sup> gave birth to a philosophy of "word-sound-power" that was to be projected through the *Poverty (Lab)-Oratory*. Thus, the lab that was "designed to keep the poor people in a dependent situation began to backfire" and gave rise to "an art of verbal combat". This 'oratory' which has been "emerging in the streets is being viewed as a learnt system and an attitude of public engagement and discourse with mobilising and transformative potential" (2003:832).

The *Poverty Lab-Oratory* is but one of myriad examples of the dialectical prowess of the Rastafari. This kind of linguistic revision and resistance emerges from a movement that views itself as being comprised of "the earth most strongest" people because it was conceived in the lowest reaches of deprivation and nourished on some of the most extreme forms of cultural and racial degradation and repression. Despite this, Rastafarianism has been accredited as having effectively *exorcised the ideology of racism in Jamaica* (Chevannes, 1989). In addition, they can also be seen as having excavated from the remnants of a stolen and defiled culture, a set of linguistic tools for interpreting and expressing aspects of the essence of the suffering endured by the masses. Their messages and philosophies of freedom and of *Man* have gained recognition not only in Jamaica, but across the globe through music.

### 3.7.2 Sufferer Stories in Songs of Sufferation

It should be noted that different individuals adapt the various poverty discourses available to them according to their specific needs. As such, conducting the *archaeology* of current conceptualisations of poverty does not only require identification of oppositional characterisations

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<sup>30</sup> The term 'sufferation' is another Rastafarian inflection. It takes the word suffer and transforms it from a verb into a process or a state of being which appeals to a struggle against oppression.



of experiences of deprivation, but also assessments of how representations were deployed by particular contexts to meet particular ends. These historical strategies of appropriation are instructive in understanding the ways in which people today use and at other times push against dominant definitions of poverty. Music as an art form serves many purposes in Jamaica; here it will be discussed in terms of its contribution to the Jamaican poverty understanding and vernacular. Devonish (1998:33) who has elaborated on the role of modern electronic technologies in Jamaica, noted that they have done for the oral transmission of culture and interpretations of the social world, what print has done for writing and have facilitated the "re-emergence of orature". The age of the music video has added a further dimension to the circulation of sufferer stories by enabling, alongside traditional discourses, the mass dispersal of images of the squalor that chronically afflicts too many Jamaican communities.

Renown lyricist, Linton Kwesi Johnson (1976:398), in making the case for *Jamaican Rebel Music* and musicians explains that they tell "of the burden of the history of oppression, rebellion, and repression", but "not only does the poetry of Jamaican music lament the suffering of the 'sufferers', it also asserts their strength and determination to struggle on relentlessly". Johnson recited that saying from the 'old-time people': "*he who feels it knows it*", in contending that "it is the sufferer from the urban ghettos, the 'creation rebels' who has 'travelled up that rough old road' to find his daily bread who really has the say" (1976:398). One of the earliest of these popular musical reflections on society from the perspective of the sufferer was the Ethiopians' 1969 song, *Everything Crash*:

Look dere now, everything crash  
Look dere now, everything crash  
Firemen strike, water men strike  
Telephone company too, down to the policemen do

What gone bad ah morning can't come good ah evening, whoa  
What gone bad ah morning can't come good ah evening, whoa  
Everyday you carry bucket to the well, one day the bucket bottom must drop out  
Everyday you carry bucket to the well, one day the bucket bottom must drop out  
Everything crash! Lord Whoa (Ethiopians, *Everything Crash*, 1969)

The Ethiopians' reference to the "crash" of "everything" was a distinct reading of an epidemic of strikes which threatened to cripple the country the previous year. Musicians were not the only voices declaring that there was a crisis, politicians and journalists were of the opinion that "Jamaica was heading for a pretty great fall" since there can "be no enduring prosperity in a land of industrial anarchy" (Durham, 1968). The contention was that fundamentally it was low output per man hour, as well as shortages of trained workers, and of enterprise, which were among the causes of poverty. What workers needed to do was produce more, not disrupt production. Strikes exponentially exaggerated the situation and as such "the nation was being raped and the people sacrificed on the alter of acquisitiveness" (Durham, 1968; Sunday Gleaner, 1968).

The Ethiopians did not see the strikers as having a "callous disregard for the national interest" (Durham, 1968). Rather, their interpretation was characteristically projected through everyday maxims that structure many of the critiques from the perspectives of "soul rebels" and sufferers. Firstly, they outlined that *what went bad in the morning cannot become good in the evening*, suggesting that those who have been beguiled into accepting a rotten and exploitative social system will inevitably be frustrated in their expectation that it will "come good" later and raise their standard of living. Secondly, they contend that *if everyday the same bucket goes to the well, one day the bottom of that bucket will eventually fall out*. The reasoning here is that there is a limit to the amount of daily grinding and daily oppression that people can endure. The cataclysmic spate of strikes took place six years after the optimism and exuberant promises of national

independence; six years when very little or nothing changed in the sufferation wrought by material and social order. For those informed by the aforementioned interpretations available in folk wisdom, there would have been no surprise when in 1968, "*everything crash!*"

Even while dispensing the IMF medicines, retrenching their meagre programmes of support, and devising ever more conceptually derisory views of the poor, politicians have not been able to escape the mass appeal of music and have sought to tie political campaigns to the most popular anthems of hope and longsuffering (incumbent parties) or of suffering and resistance (opposition parties). Bounty Killer's (also known as "the Poor People Governor") defiant cry of "Poor People Fed Up!" became one of these battle grounds. It told a tale of frustration with the social and political system in Jamaica:

Mi ask the leader, him a the arranger  
Fi mek poor people surround by danger  
Lion for roach, and giant mosquita  
Sewage water dat fill with bacteria  
You ever take a look down in the Riverton area,  
Back To, or Seaview, Waterhouse, Kentyre  
Long time the MP him don't come near yah  
And all the one that claim say she ah councillor  
Rob 75 percent and give we quarter  
Conquer the land, and won't give we a acre  
Disconnect we light and chop of we water  
To the Kings of Kings, well mi know them shall answer (Bounty Killer, 1996, *Fed Up*)

This and other songs such as *My Experience* where he discusses "how the poor survive", allowed Bounty Killer to "top the pack" of Dancehall artists for 1996 (Chandler, 1997). However, it was the "we fed up!" outcry that had gripped the imagination of the masses, and as such it became

irresistibly attractive to the political machinery. A request was made by the opposition, Jamaica Labour Party, for *Fed Up* to be used as an official anthem in their 1997 electoral campaign. This was rejected by Bounty Killer who noted: "I made it for the people, not for politicians" (Oumano, 1997:24). Battles between politicians and deejays who feel their music is not meant for the "politricks" forum would become a theme of election periods. Yet, the political appeal of popular songs (and politicians appearance at shows such as "Ghetto Splash" (Chandler, 1997)), illustrates an acknowledgement amongst policy-makers that the varying *sufferer* interpretations of poverty resonate with the legions of deprived people who form the voting public. According to Johnson (1976:402), "the popular music of Jamaica, the music of the people is an essentially experiential music" not only because they can experience and enjoy it but because it reflects the true historical experience of the people – a history that is both memory of the distant past and "the unbearable weight of the present". It is in this sense, that "The Poor People Governor" would explain that, "me live dem life deh [I lived that life] and that's why me talk about it. If poverty was a thing of the past mi wouldn't sing about it but it's not, for it is very much prevalent in our country" (Sunday Gleaner, 2001).

The popular artists who so intelligibly represent an alternative version of poverty as an experience (shared or individual) characterised by, among other things, suffering, neglect and general downpression, largely operate within a theoretical vacuum. They serve as one of the few agents, bringing to the fore (though often in controversial terms) the views of the marginalised in the society. However, inasmuch as social science research (participatory or otherwise) does not reflect an objective *truth*, popular or folk perspectives are not a direct reflection of "the way things are" and as such engaging with and possibly *scientising* these views is not a straightforward or simple process. There are innumerable responses to deprivation and if there is anything that

Jamaican music conclusively reflects about Jamaican life; it is the range of diverse views that tends to emerge around an issue. As Marshall (2006:49) has argued, the shifts from *modern blackness* to *foreign mind*, from *transnational cosmopolitanism* to *militant pan-Africanism*, and from *radical remixology* to *outright mimicry*, show that music "in Jamaica embodies the myriad ways that Jamaicans embrace reject, and incorporate foreign yet familiar forms". Reggae/Dancehall has no single essence, except as a reference to the complexity of the innumerable dispositions which form the public mood and mind.

The music industry itself is structured in distinct modes of exclusion and creates its own social antagonisms. This particularly applies to the depiction of women's narratives from women's perspectives. The Sistren Theatre Collective may be seen as one corrective to this cultural scotoma and at the same time an avenue which opened (and still opens) up popular discourses of poverty to *different* possibilities. It was formed when ten women (street sweepers in a crash employment programme) who were brought together for a one-off play for Workers Week in 1977 decided to continue producing and performing (Ford-Smith, 1986, 1995). According to Ford-Smith, these women were "living examples of what it meant to be poor and growing up in Jamaica around the time of independence and thereafter":

The women in the group were part of a tradition of storytelling, songs, and ritual imagery. Not only had these forms developed out of attempts to struggle with a powerful colonial system; they also contained the voices of women in strong protest and complaint, something which was not true of modern popular Jamaican music (Ford-Smith, 1986:4).

A "community of thought and feeling" was established to explore – both in deprived communities across the country and theatre performances – the suffering, exploitation, abuse and oppression that women experience as mothers, housewives, higglers, prostitutes, go-go dancers, domestic workers, *etc* (Ford-Smith, 1986, 1995). The Sistren story is instructive to this discussion not only because it highlights a forum for the public exploration of women's often hidden struggles, but

also because it is an exemplification of the fact that the dramatisation and non-verbal expressions of suffering can reach the popular consciousness and make emotional connections to the masses in a manner similar to music and in *different* ways.

No single avenue of discourse production and expression can be essentialised as holding the truth of the experiences of people's suffering or their poverty, however popular (e.g. music or drama) or however scientifically sophisticated (e.g. academia or government). Instead, it is imperative to continually explore the very different strategies individuals and groups use to interpret and act upon the relations of power which act upon their lives and the possibilities of their lives. To the extent that the admittedly complex, contradictory and protean popular inflections of what it means to be poor remain outside dominant conceptual frameworks, the dominant constructs will remain in conflict with the meaning people give to their experiences. To live and feel an experience is to gain a unique type of knowledge of it and generally, those who are/become the recognised *experts* on poverty have never *felt* and so "don't *know* what is like to face real ghetto pain, [or] to face real ghetto pressure" (Stephenson, *Ghetto Pain*, 2008).

### 3.8. Conclusion

The story told in this chapter is chronologically elliptical in the sense that it misses out chunks of time and focuses on events that have been interpreted as central in shaping or transforming the discourses on the poor in Jamaica and specifically on official and popular modes of conceiving, defining and researching the poor's experiences. It is also elliptical in the sense that it has been written from a position which sees in a particular way, can only see particular things and therefore

undoubtedly misses out viable contributions. It is important to reiterate here that neither a *real* or *better* definition of poverty has been proposed. The aim was to discover facets of the historical determinants of the dominant (*i.e.* academic mainstream and official policy) poverty line, but also to expose how its retentions that have travelled from earlier (and openly exploitative) forms of social organisation have changed through time. Additionally, a key aim has been to reveal the tensions that exist between the orthodox method of defining poverty (which itself is inherently contradictory in purpose, means and ends) and the continued existence of many of the social relations which in the past have led to resistance and open rebellion (*e.g.* 1930s, 1960s). These relations are widely recognised (even by those who apply the poverty line) as having impelled an engagement/re-engagement with the masses as a viable political entity.

As such, this chapter is not a conclusive history of poverty or of thinking and writing on poverty. Rather, the arguments here are presented as explorations of *traces* (to use Derrida's term (1982a)) found at key sites of discourse production (*e.g.* documents of colonial government, academic literature, popular music, *etc.*) which influence or have influenced how the poor are conceived and represented. The preceding sections have postulated that an abstract poverty line cannot in its statistical machinations appreciate the extent of the poor's internecine battle for space and account for the ambiguous (and sometimes violent) identities they construct as protection from a job market and society that regards and treats them as human detritus. On the other hand, in their current form, the studies that have avoided the pitfalls of absolute poverty are themselves bedevilled by a lack of theoretical *precision* that would enable the identification of the poor. This seems to indicate there is a need for a lens through which the outlook for poverty reduction/eradication is completely transformed so that those who are severely impoverished can be qualitatively distinguished and prioritised without the fatuity of believing that by removing the

worst levels of deprivation, poverty will have been eradicated. Without such a catharsis which reorients the concept of poverty towards an acknowledgement of the numerous permutations of impoverishment, unconscionable levels of human suffering and hardship resulting from social and economic injustice will persist, even where there are genuine efforts to tackle extreme deprivation.

Integral to any attempt to reconceptualise poverty should be the objective of expanding the emancipatory narratives beyond arts-based branches of knowledge (where most alternative versions of poverty currently reside as articles of popular culture) and subject them also to the appreciation and interrogation of the so-called scientific fields. The protean nature of downpression and greed has continued to frustrate the perpetual and sanguinary struggle for repose, of the now racially mixed descendants of those deracinated African peoples implanted as forage for the ravenous system of slavery in the British *Commonpoverty*. The overt thralldom has faded in the emergence of polite but savage structural violence accompanied by a refusal to recognise the squalid reservoir of deprivation which continues to nourish Caribbean modernity. Social progress in the region cannot continue to be measured by abstract and inanimate numbers. The latent griots of struggles, past and current, must begin to inform and influence the direction of the research. Those persons and groups, who feel the everyday bite of deprivation possess, and often know they possess, their own kind of knowledge which may offer an invaluable service to scholarly and policy understandings. Indeed, *sense mek before book*.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Methodological Encounters of the Autoethnographic Kind**

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter is an anamnesis which calls to the foreground my personal impressions of the research principles and the processes that have been employed in the production of this thesis. Before embarking on that enterprise however, a brief description is provided of the community in which fieldwork was conducted. This includes a commentary on the locality it sits within, its inhabitants and some of its key institutions. The discussion then changes tone and style by selecting experiences in the field and beyond for interrogation as exemplifications of wider methodological concerns. Through critical reflection, I explore a number of my research practices. These include my encounters with: (a) gaining access or entry into the community; (b) conflicts and contradictions between my epistemological position and both my research and interview questions; (c) getting to know the subject/object of my research; (d) complexities of analysing and representing the data collected; (e) the limitations of my work that I could identify; and (f) the ethics of my practice and representations. In this introductory section, I briefly outline the specifics of my data collection which become the point of departure in the *retelling* in Section 4.3.

The research took place within two intervals: firstly, roughly an eight month period between the 13<sup>th</sup> of January and the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2008 and secondly, a brief return visit from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2009. During these two periods: (a) 37 interviews (22 males and 15 females) were conducted and recorded with the knowledge and consent of the informants; (b) there were four focus group sessions. The first two were Adult Focus Group sessions (AFG 1 and 2) with ten participants each and the remaining two were Youth Focus Group sessions (YFG 1 and 2) with 13 and 12 participants respectively. Adults who attended were between the ages of 26-54 and

youths were between the ages of 14-22;<sup>31</sup> (c) there were daily informal interactions (at individual and group levels); (d) an autophotographic exercise was organised and completed involving eight participants (five males and three females); and finally (e) based on all the above data collection methods, detailed dairy entries were made.

The 'working inquiry' that guided these activities in the field (particularly from the half-way point of the first period) was: how does the official poverty machinery (in terms of definition and policy) relate to the ways people live in the community? This was so as to collect data on the more general research question: *what is the nature of the relationship between the dominant poverty construct and ways peoples experience deprivation?* On analysis, three specific areas of concern were generated from the data which form the three empirical chapters:

- (i) How do the processes and relations around 'meaning-making' influence what can be known about poverty? (Chapter 5)
- (ii) What are some of the effects of the limits which have been imposed by the abstraction of poverty from social relations? (Chapter 6)
- (iii) What are some of the intricacies of the ways people view living *in* deprivation? (Chapter 7)

The propellant for the discussion that is undertaken here is the need to consider, as comprehensively as possible, the impact that researchers have/may have on the production of data by exposing my own problems, conflicts and successes in the field.

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<sup>31</sup> The Jamaican government defines youths as those between the ages of 10-24 (National Centre for Youth Development, 2002).

## **4.2. The Community: Windsor and its Surroundings**

### **4.2.1 St. Ann and St. Ann's Bay**

St. Ann is located on the northern coast of Jamaica and is the largest of 14 parishes in the island. The interior of the parish is largely comprised of a number of communities which are bereft of what the PIOJ would call “publicly provided infrastructure” and therefore meet the criteria for its category of “public poverty” (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2008). In these areas, farming is almost exclusively the livelihood strategy. As such, agriculture is a key means of sustenance for a large part of the parish's population. St. Ann, however, is most famous as a tourist destination and Ocho Rios, which is located on the coastal tip of the parish, is one of the three most visited parts of the island alongside Montego Bay (in the parish of St. James) and Negril (in the parish of Westmoreland). The communities closest to the coast are covered with guest houses, resorts, hotels and villas as well as many attractions (e.g. Dunn's River Falls, Dolphin Cove, Mystic Mountain) and satellite services such as restaurants, craft markets and tour operation companies. The tourism industry then, economically dominates St. Ann which is also called the Garden Parish for its greenery and beautiful scenery.

The parish also houses two major towns which act as centres of commerce, residential areas and transit points (for locals) into the surrounding tourist destinations (Brown's Town and St. Ann's Bay). Perhaps the most prominent of the commercial centres is St. Ann's Bay which also serves as the capital of St. Ann. Undoubtedly then, St. Ann's Bay derives much of its employment opportunities and general economic sustenance from the success of the tourism industry. However, in recent years there has been a decline in visitor numbers traced roughly to the period after the terrorist attacks in the United States on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001. The crisis saw to a

fall in tourist arrivals of 7.5% and an increase in unemployment in the parish of 19.8% (Jamaica Observer, 2005a). It was nevertheless baffling to many residents that the PIOJ's mapping of the geography of poverty in 2001/2002 found St. Ann to be the "poorest parish in Jamaica" (see, Evans, 2005). The PIOJ accorded to St. Ann a poverty prevalence rate of 37.1% and to St. Ann's Bay a rate of 33.8% (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2008:10). Though they had been released earlier (to the media and used in other official publications), the findings were formally published in 2008 and they were intensely contested in the different media fora. The highlights of the debate were captured in an article for the Sunday Gleaner newspaper (Manning, 2008). The article dealt with the question of why a parish "cashing in on tourism dollars from its Ocho Rios resort hub" would seem to be so deeply "steeped in poverty". The arguments and counter-arguments were centred on the domination of the sector by all-inclusive hotels (Manning, 2008). Indeed, through fixed pricing (Issa & Jayawardena, 2003:168), the hotelier interest has been able to largely colonise and determine the tourists' experience of Jamaica as it simultaneously colonises and determines the income generation possibilities of supporting industries.

In response to the pressures of attracting investment in tourism in a declining market, the Jamaican government has granted a number of subsidies and tax incentives to the hotel industry. One of these sees the waiving of corporate taxes "for hotels undergoing any type of construction" (Rose, 2010). This has led to an increase in hotel building activities along the North Coast. It has been argued that while the building activity provides relatively short term and low-skilled employment, "the intermittent demand for this pool of labour often results in the proliferation of unplanned settlements and squatter communities that are established close to the resort areas" (Edwards, 2009). The interaction of employment in tourism with the growth of informal settlements is not a new phenomenon. In fact, one of the oldest and most notorious squatter

communities in the parish emerged around reputedly, the first hotel built in St. Ann, The Windsor Hotel.

#### **4.2.2 The Windsor “Pocket of Poverty”**

The Social Development Commission (SDC) in both its *Development Area Profile* (2008) and associated *Community Profile* (2009) noted that St. Ann's Bay is comprised of: Charles Town (also referred to as Marley), St. Ann's Bay (centre), Seville (also referred to as Seville Heights) and Windsor Heights (which is comprised of the middle-income housing scheme called 'Windsor Heights' and the squatter community referred to as 'Windsor'). From a survey conducted on the region, it was reported that “St Ann's Bay is the business hub of the Development Area however it also has pockets of poverty”. These were noted to be: (a) to the southern end of the town there is “the squatter district of Edge Hill”; (b) to the northern end there is “the small dilapidated settlement of Harbour Street and Ghetto”; and (c) to the eastern end there is “the squatter settlement of Windsor” (Social Development Commission, 2008:74). The research presented in this thesis was conducted in the Windsor “pocket of poverty”.

According to an “elder” of Windsor, “the first set of tourist in Jamaica booked out in the Windsor Hotel and for a long period of years lots of them used to come here” (Mr. Charles, Interview Transcript #33). Another of those considered an “elder” claimed that “in the early 70s, 80s and 90s things wasn't so bad, moving to Windsor was an opportunity for them. Windsor was a nice quiet village for years, but it was destroy by the younger heads” (Informal Conversation with Sparky, Field Diary Entry: Monday 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 2008). The presence of the hotel had ensured that a few residents had access to electricity and piped water in the “early years” (as referred to by residents). However, for most of those who settled beyond the immediate vicinity of the hotel,

those amenities would be long in coming and for the vast majority they have still not arrived. In summarising the present status of the community one informant indicated that “people living in Windsor don’t unite like in the 70s, 80s and from about the 90s police start to target Windsor since the land was capture land and because the young male them terrorising the females at Windsor Girls’ Home. Is just really that mash up the place” (Miss Vicky, Interview Transcript #34).

The SDC’s two reports confirm the local impression that Windsor is “mash up” as may be gleaned from a comparison of the facilities in the community with those in St. Ann’s Bay as a whole. The pattern as depicted in Table 4:1 below is that in terms of access to some significant public and private amenities in St. Ann’s Bay generally, Windsor seems disproportionately affected by deprivation. A constantly reiterated point is that there are two standpipes to serve the entire community when only very few persons have water piped into their yards and/or houses. The lack of electricity and paved and tarred access roads are other central concerns which are almost always mentioned in research contexts. As described by many residents, these deficits have little to do with affordability, but are instead rooted in a deep seated hatred of the community by those with the power to effect improvements to the Windsor’s infrastructure.

**Table 4:1 Comparative Statistics on Facilities in St. Ann's Bay and Windsor**

Facilities	St. Ann's Bay (%)	Windsor (%)
Housing		
• Predominantly concrete, block and/or brick	60	9
• Predominantly wood and/or zinc	18	88
Electricity (legal connections)	97	35
Sanitation		
• Flush toilet	80	12
• Pit latrines	18	40
Water Source (multiple responses allowed)		
• Private access e.g. piped to dwelling	43	12
• Standpipe	15	91
• Buy water	10	55
• River	0.7	100

Source: Social Development Commission (2009)

Having presented some of the comparative statistics on public and household characteristics of the study community using data provided by the SDC, the discussion that follows points to some of the formal and informal institutions, paying particular attention to the Windsor Girls' Home as a focal point that structures internal and external perceptions. This synoptic glance at Windsor and its surroundings then concludes by reflecting on the complex and often ambiguous views of the community as a place of solidarity and a "mash up" place.

### **4.2.3 The Girls' Home and the Police**

In 1977 the Children's Services Division of the Ministry of Youth and Community Development converted the disused Windsor Hotel into a home for female wards of the state (Jamaica Gleaner, 1985, 1987). The institution serves the society in general rather than the community directly by housing some of the most impoverished and vulnerable children in the country. It has also come to greatly influence how the locality is viewed. Many residents have contended that the relations between "the youths", the police and the Windsor Girls' Home is the cause of much of the animus that is directed at Windsor from surrounding areas. There has been television news coverage of the problem as well as a number of articles in national newspapers such as, *Rapists Target Girls' Home - Predators Lure Wards off Compound* (Sunday Gleaner, 2007b) or *Windsor Girls' Home Struggles to Keep Wards Safe*, (Jamaica Observer, 2005b; see also, Jamaica Gleaner, 2005). These have affirmed negative preconceptions of inhabitants as a whole and they have added new debilities to an already considerable pile of symbolic deficiencies associated with a dangerous "squatter" imaginary.

Though there are claims that the issues associated with the Windsor Girls' Home emerged in the 1990s, the request from staff for fencing and improved security as soon as the institution was set



up may be seen as indicative of longer running concerns. For example, in the 1980s it was reported that the home was being regularly “visited by a group of men who hang around and try to entice the young girls with offers of money or nights out dancing. Lonely girls are vulnerable girls (and easy prey)” (Jamaica Gleaner, 1987). Therefore, there has always been a problem with some residents. However, as a number of social changes have taken place in the locality of St. Ann’s Bay, the impression has grown that Windsor is generally comprised of widespread immorality and lechery. It was recently reported that:

Teenage girls in state care at the Windsor Child Care Facility in St. Ann are being raped by men who lure them from the institution and commit the heinous crimes...The all-girls’ facility is apparently being targeted as a feeding ground for sexual predators from nearby communities (Sunday Gleaner, 2007b).

What was once the predatory practice of a specific “group of men,” was now being represented as emanating from undifferentiated reservoirs of sexual depravity. One of the effects of such generalisations is the exacerbation of already deep splits in the community and the intensification of residents’ struggles with and/or against each other to gain and maintain a ‘good reputation’.

Though only a few residents of the community frequent the Home, Windsor in its entirety, has become tarnished by the infamy of the activities at the Girls’ Home.<sup>32</sup> There are often reports that girls have been forcibly abducted and raped or have willingly absconded with men from Windsor. In either case it is notoriously difficult to identify and catch the specific perpetrators and even when they are apprehended, prosecutions are usually unsuccessful. These events and the publicity they are given mean that the police must constantly visit the community so as to attend to complaints from the staff of the Girls’ Home and limit the threat posed. As a result, the police

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<sup>32</sup> Members of staff at the Home estimate that about 30 male youths and adult men frequently hover around the premises and seek to illicitly engage wards.

have established a sphere of control in front of the Home, and there they make regular violent contact with the cohort of Windsor male youths (and some adult men) who hover and hang out in that zone. Both would like to avoid encountering each other – the police want to keep the men away from the Girls' Home and the men don't want to be caught and beaten. As such, they engage in a perpetual 'cat and mouse' exchange – as the police are observed arriving, the youths scamper away and as the police leave, the youths slowly descend to resume their parlaying with the girls. Occasionally, one or two youths will delay their departure for too long and will be chased by police officer(s). If caught, there is usually no prosecution but there is an attempt to ensure that the punishment is a brutal and thorough deterrent to others. Thus far, this has been an unsuccessful strategy because it is acknowledged by all parties involved that the police cannot maintain an around the clock presence. The tendency towards brutality feeds on the activities surrounding the Home, but it is also related to a host of other very complex and contradictory relations between the police and members of the community.

#### **4.2.4 Other Formal and Informal Social Organisations**

The routines surrounding the Girls' Home are integral in shaping internal and external negative perceptions of Windsor and these impressions seem to be compounded by a lack of direct engagement with established organisations. While it is served by the institutions within St. Ann's Bay, there is nevertheless a dearth of formal infrastructure and associated social organisations within the boundaries of Windsor itself as shown in Table 4:2 below.

**Table 4:2 Infrastructure for Social Organisations and their Functions**

Infrastructure	Functions
Church of God of Prophecy	Church
Christ Community Church	Church; Windsor Basic School; Windsor Uprising Community Youth Club (assisted by the SDC)
New Ball Ground	Playing field which hosts a variety of internal sporting activities and community events
Windsor Lawn*	Open field used for major community events (e.g. beauty pageants, "Back to School" events etc); Playing field used to host major sporting activities

\*Windsor Lawn sits on the outskirts of the area, but is formally recognised as a part of the Windsor Community.

Despite their social and economic marginality in terms of direct contact with outside (formal and informal) institutions, some residents are particularly enthusiastic and proud of aspects of their community. In interviews and conversations there were frequent referrals to the periods when they "pull together" to accomplish things that were perceived as positive objectives (e.g. assisting a neighbour with house building, clearing footpaths or clearing up gullies). One occasion regarded as an expression of unity and community spirit is the weekly river party (formerly called "Wet Wet") which attracts a mass following from inside the community as well as many outsiders. Though mostly aimed at generating income for varying community businesses (sound system operators, shops, bars, cooks, etc.), such events are often used to put on back-to-school, Labour Day projects and other targeted fund-raising activities.

A foremost source of community pride is the mineral spring (locally referred to as "The Mineral" or "Firewater") where a number of residents have formed an informal co-operative to supplement livelihoods and to promote Windsor as a possible tourist attraction for both local and international visitors. As early as 1896, The Mineral was documented to be of interest (Institute of Jamaica, 1896:51). However, community legend has named 104 year old (in 2008), Granny May, as the first to locate "The Mineral" and to discover its potential as a source of "floating fire" (Mr. Charles,

Interview Transcript #33). The spring has featured in a number of television programmes on interesting sites of Jamaica (such as “Hill an’ Gully Ride”) and its history and properties have been discussed in a number of newspaper articles (Jamaica Gleaner, 1927; Sunday Gleaner, 2007a; Mitchell, 2007). Windsor residents who are not directly involved in running the mineral spring freely use it and they are also able to intermittently earn income by sharing in what is collected if they attract local and/or foreign bathers or if they generally assist with the daily operations.

#### **4.2.5 “Windsor Poor, but it Nice”**

At the end of the first youth focus group session, I commissioned a map (see Map 4:1) to reflect some of the results from the exercises (e.g. classification, wealth ranking), geographically significant information (e.g. houses, shops, bars, green spaces, churches, Windsor Girls’ Home) and key sites of interest (e.g. the mineral spring, areas with/without electricity). Thus, the map contains a social geography of Windsor as co-produced within a focus group setting and interpreted by three cartographers. Though there was an effort to do so, the map does not reproduce exactly the layout of the community (e.g. there were noticeable errors and attempts to correct them). It was envisaged within the imperatives of the study as one point of comparison (other such maps were planned for other focus group sessions) for local ideas on poverty. Consequently, there is within it an ideological component as informed by research interactions (e.g. wealth ranked houses). This feature allows it to reflect more than just planes, lines and figures showing the community layout. It may arguably stand as an endeavour to depict, through diagrammatic representation, the social constitution of the community in relation to a negotiated version of poverty as well as an indication of how the environment is operated in. In other words,

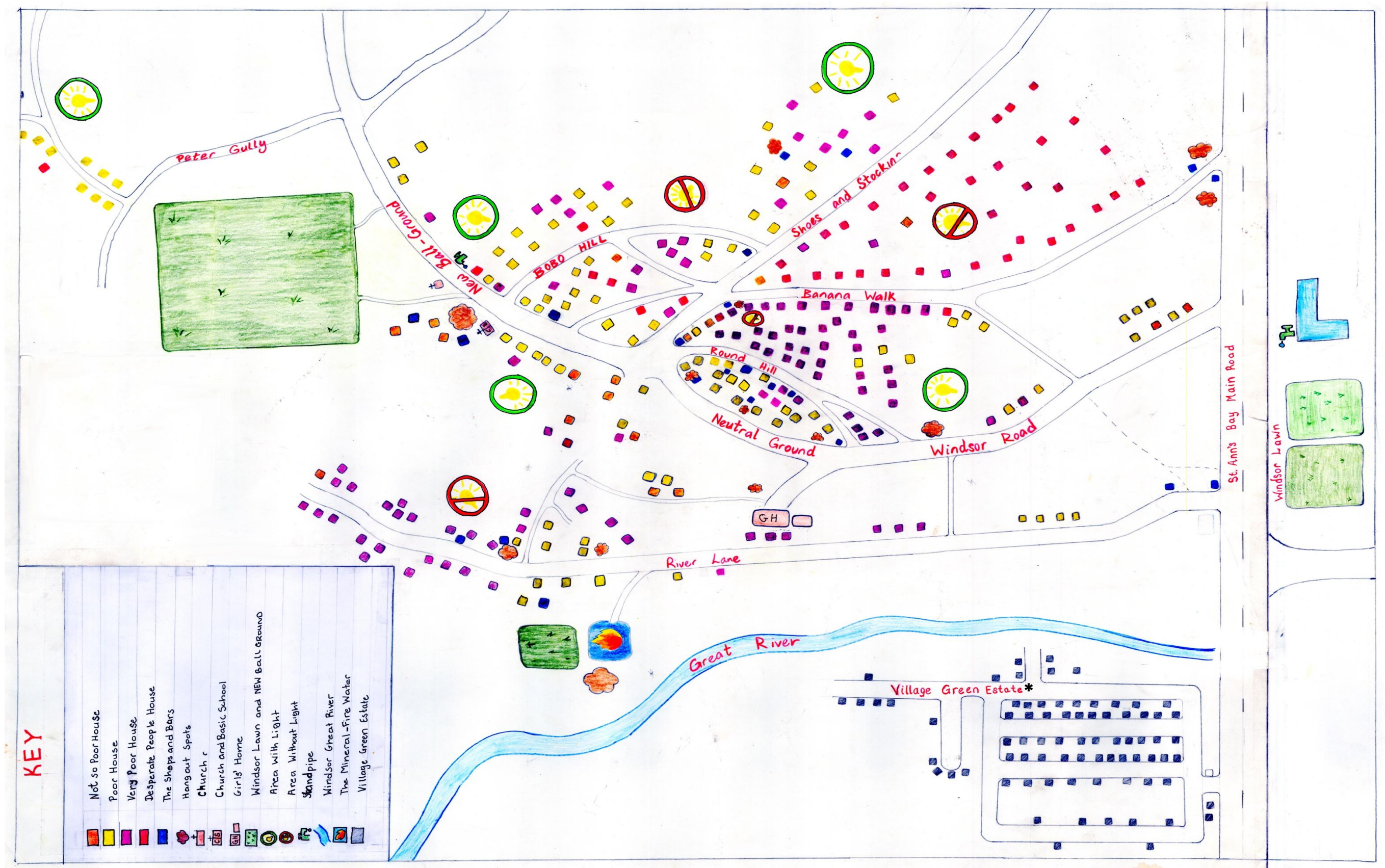
it may be seen as one partial (and academically shaped) description of how the community is being lived.

Throughout the thesis Windsor is examined as a place where its inhabitants are forced to battle against grave symbolic and material deprivations. In fact, Windsor became a place of interest primarily because of its official association with both “public” and individual poverty (as defined by the PIOJ and applied by the SDC). However, though it is central, suffering through deprivation is only one facet of life and living in the community. As such, it is essential to acknowledge the many residents who, despite their hardships, have pride in their surroundings and close attachments to their neighbours. While discussing the parties and events that the residents engage in, one informant explained: “Windsor poor but it nice” (Tango, Interview Transcript #19). It is this seeming paradox that bedevils the analysis conducted here on the social relations of the community. Being ‘poor’ typically carries with it multiple symbolic deficits and areas identified as poor places are vilified and not usually associated with “niceness”. It is in this sense that Hooks contended that the poor are only spoken of as “objects” and argued that mainstream representations usually ignore the fact that life can be “meaningful” and fulfilling even as the harshness and coldness of living experiences inveigh against self-worth (Hooks, 1994:169). This representational disconnect may be at the heart of why many individuals and groups who live with deprivation eschew the poverty label. The results of the analyses conducted in Windsor cannot claim to have completely escaped an extension of the kind of representations which emphasises the negative aspects of impoverishment. Nevertheless, this study attempts to take a step away from traditional projections by calling into focus the social relations underlying deprivation (and therefore also poverty). Additionally, it tries to highlight those processes that are intrinsic to how the poor are represented by examining not the community in isolation, but its residents’

interactions with academics/researchers (such as myself), governmental/private institutions and with society in general.



Map 4:1 Windsor Youths' Map of Their Community



\* The Great River separates Windsor from the Village Green which is advertised as St. Ann's Bay's "first residential resort".

### **4.3. Retelling My Research Encounters...**

#### **4.3.1 ...*With Entry***

Immediately after my formal 'introductory' meeting with Windsor residents was adjourned, I scrambled around, picked up some scrap papers and wrote down my thoughts. I was trying to record as much of the event as possible and particularly a request made by a resident who had been applauded by the packed room. I was forced to forage for writing material because, as would become typical practice, the journal I had purchased as a repository for my research experiences was forgotten at home. An indispensable piece of advice given to me was that I should keep with me, at all times during my academic pilgrimage, a 'Field Diary' to record significant events and my feelings about them. This would become central to my field practice as I applied reflections to all my activities. I went out and bought a fancy journal, but never once wrote in that book. Instead, my diary entries were a collection of recollections scribbled on ad hoc pieces of paper – anything I could get my hands on when I needed to write. Eventually, I would settle on using the extra drawing books that were purchased for the exercises in my focus groups sessions. On the occasion of my 'entry meeting', the small notepad I had with me was given to the children who attended the meeting to keep them occupied during the discussion. So making this diary entry called for improvisation – I scrambled around the room and kept the words playing over and over in my head. On the floor and on some of the desks of the church/basic school/community centre where the meeting had been held, there were a number of discarded sheets of paper. I picked them up, sat down and then documented that important quote along with some of the other occurrences in the meeting.



Somewhere, about five miles from where I was writing, there was a diary specifically bought to store these notes. It was nicely decorated, voluminous, and had dedicated spaces for dates and headings. Yet, I did not want to wait to get home to make my entry. My commitment was to try, as quickly as it could be done, to describe events and set out my thoughts and reflections on my research activities and/or observations – thereby enhancing accuracy. Inasmuch as my commitment to this mode of diary keeping demanded innovative responses to immediate exigencies (albeit due to my own forgetfulness), the nearly nine month period I spent in the field would be characterised by adaptations and shifts.<sup>33</sup> The immediacies of my fieldwork had occasioned fundamental changes to my overall research design including: an overhauling of and modifications to old methods, the introduction of an unplanned data collection technique, constant shifts in the direction of research, and the recognition, critical evaluation and rethinking of several preconceptions. These revisions responded to the only things I brought to Windsor that remained unaltered – my principles of research: (a) insofar as possible allow space for informants' 'voices and choices' to influence outcomes and direct the flow of interaction within the methods employed; (b) a commitment to reflexivity and constant examination of the implications of my positionality; (c) a commitment to use those representations in countering oppression where oppressive forces were identified; and (d) respect the residents' stories and value my movements in their midst as investments and gifts to which I had a duty of care (especially in my written representations).

I made the diary entry on those scraps picked up from the floor. I wrote firstly the questions I had asked after a presentation on my aims and objectives: "what would you want from the research? What benefit do you want this research to have for your community?" The most widely supported

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<sup>33</sup> See the Research Calendar in Appendix B for details of time spent.

response was, “we would like to see you spend some time with the youths that on the streets, they need to talk to somebody different so they can get some ambition, we would like to see you talk to them and work with them and encourage them, 'cause nobody don't business with them, but them is the future” (Field Diary Entry: Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008). This was a request I could not afford to let slip into the recesses of my mind. Not simply because it was pithy, but because it spoke directly to the commandments I wanted to follow in the field. I knew even as I wrote those words that they had already impacted on my plans (though it was not yet clear in what ways). Also, I knew they would come in handy when writing my methodology chapter. But more importantly, I knew that when I got home I would have to reflect on this request and find the best ways to fulfil its intendments. I was always planning to include at each stage engagements with both the adults and the youths of the community. However, what this entreaty did was to encourage me to carve out separate spaces of interaction for those I considered youths and to spend more time than would have been the case on the “corner sides” and the “gully sides” hanging out with the jobless and un/under-educated young residents of Windsor.

The meeting which occasioned that diary entry was not my first encounter with Windsor residents. By the time it was organised I had been introduced to a number of the community ‘gatekeepers’ (to use fieldwork talk) or ‘elders’ (as they are known in local parlance). I had mingled with residents at a number of sporting competitions (cricket and football) and I had undertaken to maintain a regular presence in the community through helping to develop and promote the fledgling Windsor Uprising Community Youth Club. After about three weeks of getting to know the landscape I was ready to formally make a ‘research entry’ – to introduce myself and officially commence my data collection. I instructed some of my contacts in the youth club to mobilise as many residents as they could (of all ages) to attend a meeting where I would describe my

background, intentions/details of my research and get their feedback. Access had been carefully negotiated with a number of active persons in the community and with the help of Orville, a Community Development Officer for the Parish of St. Ann, from the SDC. I was aware that since 2002 the PIOJ had named St. Ann the poorest parish in Jamaica (Jamaica Observer, 2005a; cf. Evans, 2005) and I had asked Orville to provide me with information on various “poor” communities in the area. Though he named other localities, he asserted that Windsor was the “poorest one that I know”. Later I would come to learn from both residents and non-residents that it was also the one of the “most hated” communities in the parish.

As I arrived in Windsor on the evening of the meeting, I had my first of innumerable encounters with the law of unforeseen consequences. I had requested, a few days prior to the event, that some posters be made and placed strategically around the locality, to publicise the gathering. For the first time I was looking at one of those posters, and it read:

**Field Diary Entry: ‘Meeting Poster’ – Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008**

**ATTENTION!! ATTENTION!! ATTENTION!!**

There will be a major meeting at the Church of Christ Church at the Windsor playfield on March 4 at 6 p.m. All persons who are interested in starting a business of their own, or already started one and need direction forward are invited to participate. This venture is a collaborative effort to develop the community and the minds of the people living in this community to empowerment. This meeting will be hosted by a researcher from Bradford University in England in association with the Windsor Uprising Community Youth Club.

**LOOKING FORWARD TO DEVELOP OUR COMMUNITY TOGETHER!!**

On the way to the venue I had taken down from trees, three large cartridge papers, all with the same handwritten message. I wondered how many more of these were around the community. If gaining entry and acceptance to do research in a community was pivoted on earning and maintaining trust, I was in trouble. I thought about the fire fighting techniques I would have to employ to assuage all the angry people who would show up for a meeting about starting or improving their businesses and instead find someone talking about poverty. I was in big trouble. How would I ever convince anyone to take part after this first impression?

I had tried to get to the venue early to assist with converting the multipurpose room into a suitable community centre. The author of the posters, Mack, and other club members were already there hard at work. Following the customary salutations, I asked Mack: “how come you write that the meeting is about business?” Observing that I was perturbed, he started talking through a wry smile, “I never say we going to talk about business, I say that all people who interested in business should come. All people in Windsor interested in business, down to the baby”. By now he was laughing loudly: “you tell me that everybody must come, that mean to say people who interested in business must come too, not so? You don’t see I put about collaborative effort and empowerment and those things, you don’t like that part?” I replied: “yes that part cool, but you can’t make people believe that we going to be talking about business, they going to get vex, they going to think I am a liar and that I am selling them samfy [trying to trick them]”. Trying to reassure me he pointed out that “is long time I working with these people, if you don’t do it this way, nobody not going to come. Don’t worry yourself, you all right because I going to clear up our little confusion first and then I going to introduce you, you understand?” I was not satisfied, and told him so. He apologised, but was unrepentant noting that: “you will see how many people going to turn up”. As worried as I was about the prevarication on the poster, I could not help but

marvel at the deliberately equivocal use of discourse to draw people to the meeting. I ended the conversation with an acceptance of the apology and a subtle admonition, “alright brethren, cool, but you fix me wickedly though, you shouldn’t do me that” (Field Diary Entry: Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008).

Later that evening, the room was so full that people were standing on the outside of the venue. I was impressed and ashamed – many of them were tricked into being here. True to his word, Mack in his introduction acknowledged that a “mistake” had been made on the posters, but stressed the importance of the research I would be conducting. He announced me as a researcher with something to contribute to the community, before calling for a round of applause to welcome me. I was embarrassed by the loud uproar and Mack’s clear success; it was after all won by deception (however well intentioned). I told the gathered audience that I was from the neighbouring parish of Trelawny but staying about three miles outside of Windsor during the period of my research. I explained I was there to examine their views of and experiences with poverty. I also made it clear that I had no organisational affiliations and wouldn’t be able to pay for any of the time and efforts, but I would be a regular attendee at sporting events, gatherings and a contributor to organisational efforts at the youth club. The feedback was very positive in the question and answer session that followed. The most moving and inspirational part of the evening came when the small children who were asked to keep themselves occupied in a corner of the room presented me with letters they had written. I asked them if they would like to read their letters to the audience and they bravely agreed. One by one they went up and one by one they were given loud cheers for their efforts.<sup>34</sup> The feeling of ambition and the pride that permeated

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<sup>34</sup> Four of these letters have been attached in Appendix D.

the room was palpable; I could already see that my sojourn in Windsor would be an extraordinary adventure.

So my official entry into community was a success, but is all well that ends well? What level of oversight should I have on things done on my behalf? On the other hand, to what extent did I have a right to dictate the way that meetings were organised (I was the one asking for help)? I would have to learn lessons from this as I moved on because the support of my aids in the youth club and many of the other attendees would be needed if the research endeavour was going to be successful. I had to respect them all.

#### **4.3.2   ...*With Changing Questions***

Reflecting on an interview with one resident, Auntie Nez (my seventh), I noted in my diary: “I don’t know what to make of this encounter. It is weird, but it is probably my best interview so far, even though I don’t think I can pin down anything in it. She caught me off guard a few times” (Field Diary Entry: Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 2008). Long before entering the field, I had read and agreed that “interviews are not pipelines for transmitting knowledge but reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions” (Järvinen, 2000:371; see also, Mishler, 1986). I don’t think I really appreciated what that meant; I certainly was not practicing or evaluating my interactions in that way. For instance, after replaying the recording of my fourth interview (with Dice), I wrote: “I missed the opportunity to find out exactly when things were becoming hard for him. It would have been a lot better if I got more on the specific difficulties that he views as poverty. I need to concentrate on finding the poverty experiences per se” (Field Diary Entry: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 2008). My

interviews were literally about 'search-and-discovery' and after each I was honing my skills and sharpening my strategy to get more, to get better. I tried to learn from each exchange, to note the mistakes, to look for ways I could give the interviewee more space, and to identify specific improvements. In itself, I still think that approach can be productive, but it can also be extremely dangerous, especially if one becomes an expert in a flawed undertaking. In this case, I was so preoccupied with finding 'a local definition of poverty' which countered the official perspective and dominant discourse that I could not see that my questions were in conflict with how I believed data and data collection should be approached. My research problem was structured around the questions of: (a) Is there a local, lived concept of poverty? (b) How does lived poverty fit with the dominant conceptualisation? (c) To the extent that there are differences what implications do they have? With my fixed assumption already in place (I believed there was a local definition to be identified), finding answers to the research problems would have required that I "rely 'unproblematically' on the interview data as a transparent window on life beyond the interview" (Rapley, 2001:305). Though I did not have this belief, until my encounter with Auntie Nez, I was operating as if I did.

I marched on from the interview with Auntie Nez with a *changing* idea of what questioning does. At various points throughout our interchange we were both very busy doing identity work. The interview had been arranged the night before when I was introduced by one of my contacts. In these early stages, interviewees were arranged by introductions through contacts or other interviewees. However, as I became more familiar with the community, I independently engaged my informants. I didn't get a chance to say much to Auntie Nez on our first meeting as she was quite abrupt. She said she was busy, but if I came at 8 a.m. "on the dot", the next morning she would give me some time. She made it clear that if I was late she would not entertain me. I

arrived on schedule and exchanged greetings with Auntie Nez. However, before I could introduce myself properly she said: “I pass you all the time down by the Girls’ Home with the worthless boy them, all of you just idling. I wonder if fooling around with little girls is what you doing up here?” I was shocked, but I laughed as a defence mechanism knowing that I needed to do comprehensive damage control, and fast. I explained that it was important to hang out with the youths because apart from researching, I was trying to “pay them mind” (*i.e.* give them attention), without judging them. I made it clear that I was trying to understand and to “reach” them and if I were to have any success then regularly interacting with them on their own terms was the only way. She began gesturing in agreement and I was relieved to see that I saved myself. I now confidently went on to my interview ‘housekeeping’, such as describing the research project and outlining my ethical and practical responsibilities. We had a very interesting and what I see as a successful interchange, with many twists and turns.

As I played back the tape and wrote about that interaction in my field diary afterwards, I realised that neither she nor any of my other interviewees were exclusively responding to *my* questions. They were in part answering to who they thought I was. Bourdieu, for example contends that every linguistic interaction is not only an exchange between individuals, but also a playing out of the social, economic, political and cultural history that constitute the varying parties (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:143-144). With Auntie Nez, I had managed to save myself (and the interview) from her initial conception of *me* and as I did so she softened. I had become acceptable, but who was *I*: A researcher born and raised rural Jamaica? A researcher studying in England? A man concerned about wellbeing and social suffering? Thankfully, *I* was no longer a “worthless boy”, who preys on vulnerable girls. Thus, her question changed the course of the interview by allowing



me to reconstruct myself.<sup>35</sup> But in rescuing my own identity did I not go too far? Did I not hang out to dry, the *compadres* on the corner that I hung out with? In recovering my own worthiness, I left unchallenged the presumed identity of worthlessness ascribed to those young men Auntie Nez had seen me with. And worse than this, I reified that perception by justifying my engagement with these youths as trying to “reach” and somehow fix them – perhaps with some of the ‘worth’ I carried around in my pocket.

I owed them much more. I may not have liked or agreed with some of the activities of some of the youths and indeed, I wanted to help them attain their goals, but I didn’t have a right to confirm their condemnation. I owed them at least a defence of their ‘character’: there was wit, intelligence, guile, determination, ambition, and all sorts of ‘worth’ in those young people. On the evening of my entry meeting, a resident referred to these very youths as “the future”. *Who was I* to enter the community and their lives and contribute to their denigration? On the other hand, could I have told Auntie Nez all this and still establish the same kind of rapport? Would what I perceived as increasing openness as our interaction developed, be replicated if *I* had not changed in her eyes? Would I have gained the same ‘truths’ about what I was hunting for (*i.e.* lived poverty experiences *per se*)?

I began reading the interviews that followed differently. I was now more cognisant and respectful of the co-productive/constructive work in question and answer sessions. And yet, what I was looking for in the research was still the same. My aim was still to find that *real* other way of seeing and living poverty that was extant in Jamaica and so also extant in Windsor. The turning point

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<sup>35</sup> Auntie Nez would go on to do her own identity work which is described in Chapter 5 (see page 186-188). Also consult page 239 for a discussion of how she usurped my right to ask questions.

would come as a result of the inability to resolve epistemological antinomies within two 'participatory' youth focus group sessions I would conduct about three weeks after my interview with Auntie Nez.<sup>36</sup> When I finished reviewing the notes, worksheets and immediate reflections on both focus groups, I wrote: "the second session is a completely different situation from the first one and it really throws the cat among the pigeons. Everybody is thinking about poverty in a different way, there is no consensus to come from completely opposite views. I will have to figure out another way to discover the answers" (Field Diary Entry: Friday 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 2008). I never did. The problem, I came to realise, was that my principle of providing 'space' for participant dialogue was antithetic to arriving at the type of forum that would enable me to find that mystical local definition of poverty.

There needed to be a change, a rethinking of my research questions and methods to make them coextensive with my critical perspective. In the first place, didn't I conceive of definitions in general (and the poverty definition specifically) as discursive constructs? How then was I to *find* some extant lived version in the accounts people gave (formal interviews/informal conversations) or in our group discussions (focus groups/hanging out)? If people didn't have *it* (*i.e.* my 'local definition') stored up within themselves and if in talking to them, I was doing more than just coaxing *it* out, then wasn't I helping to construct *it*? This would neither be local, nor any more *real* (even if I thought it would be better) than the current dominant definition I opposed. I became all too aware of the fact that I was searching for a phantom. It was now completely obvious that innumerable discourses on deprivation were competing/co-existing within the Windsor vernacular and I was drawing on one or another poverty definition (as projected through these discourses) depending on contexts and positionalities. Trying to be reflexive and critical while finding this real

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<sup>36</sup> These are more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 5.

phenomenon was synonymous to playing against a stacked deck – there is just no chance of winning. Ultimately, I was actively (even if unwittingly) a co-producer of the perspectives on poverty I was searching for and believed I was *missing* or *finding*.

I had already completed four focus group sessions, two with adults and two with youths. The original intention was to organise at least four others as questions arose from my ongoing review of collected data. I decided to abandon the plans for further participatory focus groups and took a three week break from formal data collection to redesign my research (though I still visited the community regularly and made diary entries). A combination of my new approach to interviews (in terms of what I was now looking for and *finding* in them) and the results from the focus groups had forced me into a radical re-evaluation. The realisations from that process in turn meant I had to change the research questions, reorganise data collection and reinterpret the information already collected. All research-based encounters, following my short hiatus, were aimed at responding to the new problem of identifying how the official definition, and the institutions and policies guided by it, related to the lives of the individuals in the community. I had also resolved to continue with a generally unchanged format for my interviews. However, from this point onward, I would no longer singularly critically reflect on my response generating conduct after each interview (*i.e.* how I could get better responses). Rather, I would now also question and change how I negotiated myself throughout exchanges and question and change my representations of others.

I had unequivocally eschewed participation as a method of *finding* (through individual interaction or group forums) *the* local/experiential definition of poverty. Yet, I still retained a deep commitment to participation as a philosophy of engagement. There was more knowledge in

Windsor than I would be able to access or comprehend and I still believed in allowing their voices to influence the direction of my work. But our interactions would be dialogical – it was going to be represented as a *co-production*. To say the narratives in the thesis directly reflected participants' views would be to dismiss my *structured* existence as a *structurer* of those narratives. Thus, though the relations of power within research militated against its perfect application, I was interested in establishing “authentic dialogue” between “equally knowing subjects” (Freire, 1998:487). In a way then, participation was still very much a part of my practice. Most of my time was spent trying to share knowledge in informal *hanging out sessions* and informal one-on-one *reasoning* with community members or, to use Rodney's (1969) term, *grounding* with them.

### **4.3.3 ...With Getting to 'Know'**

There had been numerous methodological transformations, but the key assumption that had directed me to the research in the first place had remained. I still believed that the dominant poverty discourse (in particular the official definition and its policy sequelae) was inimical to the objective of reducing or eliminating the connoted social suffering as rooted in various social relations of deprivation. What had been transformed was my way of thinking about the problem. I was no longer hunting for that 'lived poverty' against which the dominant concept could be compared. I was interested in my own version of Bourdieu's (2001:86) attempt to “historicise the subject of historicisation” and in so doing find “what escapes the gaze of science because it is hidden in the very gaze of the scientist”. In other words, I was interested in interrogating a sort of “history of the present” bound up within the poverty construct (Foucault, 1977:22-23 and 31). The identification of 'who is poor' is neither natural nor a matter of objective reality; the 'poor' are characterised, quantified and homogenised by a set of processes deployed by those with the

power to shape discourses. These processes and the impacts they had were now the issues of concern.

Along with my new general questions there were new specific lines of inquiry which were centred on: (a) the varying discourses surrounding poverty and who they include and exclude; (b) some of the observable effects of the dominant poverty machinery on people's lives; and (c) the ways people view and represent their living conditions. These new pursuits only slightly altered the structure of my interviews. I was still interested in their demographics (*e.g.* name, age, occupation, length of residency in Windsor, *etc.*), I was still interested in their views and accounts of poverty (*e.g.* what is poverty, are you poor and why or why not, is this community poor, *etc.*) and I was still interested in certain aspects of their life experiences (*e.g.* who did you grow up with, was life difficult, tell me about your schooling, *etc.*). Also, with the interviewing strategy I was using, many and often most of my questions flowed from interviewee's responses and so openness was inherent to the process. This meant that I did not need to re-interview any of those persons I already had an audience with (at least not on the basis of the specific research questions that had been set out). Nevertheless, there was an epistemological issue I wanted to know about. To investigate this, one of my participants was formally interviewed twice.

#### **4.3.3.1 Knowing Persons/Objects**

My first interview with Tango was not a bad one, but he was my fifth interviewee and in the months that followed, I had gotten to know him a lot better. When I was not familiar with my respondents, they tended to be quite formal initially and as our dialogue progressed they would become more relaxed. This was not the case with Tango. Though he was not overly abrupt in our first encounter, I saw him as very reserved in that there was an air of facticity in some of his

answers and he constantly referred to me as “sir”. For instance, when we talked about the community’s make up he used percentages which I found strange and attributed to factors of context and positionality:

**Interviewer:** In terms of the community though would you say it poor?

**Tango:** I would say like 40% in the community would be like in my class and some would – [pause] – about 20% would be higher than me and then one next 40% would be very, very, poor and can’t find nothing (Interview Transcript #5).

It was the first time I had come across someone who described the community in that mode. As we continued the discussion, the authority marker of “sir” punctuated his sentences and I was of the opinion that this decorum impacted on his explanations:

**Interviewer:** You have any subjects?

**Tango:** No sir.

**Interviewer:** So what about training?

**Tango:** No sir. After I leave school I just kind of do some tour guide thing, but after I do that I just start do security work. That’s what I’m doing right now sir.

**Interviewer:** So what you did want to become? And when you was at school you never get encouragement or so to go on?

**Tango:** To how it did set sir, I never really qualifying and thing so I try think about the water sports thing. Like how I leave school now I trying to look about it now. I almost get through now still (Interview Transcript #5).

In our second interview, I was looking for changes in these areas. I discovered that Tango’s statistical predilections had not disappeared:

**Interviewer:** Would you say life was difficult growing up?

**Tango:** It was difficult but not 100% difficult, you see it?

**Interviewer:** What you mean by that?

**Tango:** Like even to go school the money was there to go but not all the while. Not 100% of the time about 75% of the time, you see it? (Interview Transcript #19).

On the other hand, quite clearly, there was a major shift in the way he addressed me and the manner in which he explained things:

**Interviewer:** So in terms of school and things like that you used to get encouragement to do well, how come you never go on?

**Tango:** Alright, I going to show you. I going to show you how it go. Is really waste, I was wasting my time at school, you know. You see Kurt, when I was going school from primary school and so. It's not bragging or nothing, but I did really brilliant those times. But you see the people that I was around, they wouldn't even say to me that I brilliant and those things. They make you go school but they don't really encourage me and thing. Even the teacher, would only say you brilliant but they not encouraging you to work hard and make sure that you don't waste you time and idle out the thing (Interview Transcript #19).

The differences, I suppose, could be consequences of mood or of context (a different space-time), but I cannot help but impute the changes at least partially to the effects of the researcher getting to know the participant (and vice versa) and developing a good rapport (though field encounters are never devoid of power relations).

Before the second interview, Tango had asked why I was interviewing him again. I told him that I wanted some more information. After completing the session I confessed that I was in fact running an experiment on him and as I played back a part of the recording of the first interview we laughed about the extent of his formality. We discussed how I thought about interviews and the fact that I did not think the second account was "better" than the first, just different because I now knew him more. Reflecting on that comment and how I have practiced my reading of the interviews, I find problems with the position I had taken then. What exactly did I get to know, that is demonstrable in the 'experiment'? Could I say I had gotten to know the object of research

better? Well then, what exactly was my object? Was it Tango? Was it his life experiences? Was it poverty? Or was it the relations of deprivation I saw him as being involved in? I was not attempting to study *Tango*; in the words of Kvale (2006:481), I was aiming to understand his point of view and to unfold the meaning of his “lived world”. Irrespective of which constituent of his ‘lived world’ I was researching, the theory I worked under was that I could only get to my target by building rapport and a sort of knowledge-based trust with participants (either by identity work in the interview itself or prior to it). Since that was the case (and still is), I was wrong in saying that I did not think the second interview was “better” than the first – though I do believe one is not necessarily ‘truer’ than the other. Undeniably, I appreciate the second of the exchanges more. If research were a leg of chicken for example, then it could be said that I conceived of the second interview as closer to the bone of the matter (provided that one likes chicken bones as much as Tango had expressed). Indeed, getting ‘better’ knowledge is why I poured over my recordings and tried to improve my interviewing conduct.

I always tried to respect the accounts I heard and those that offered them. Materially deprived Windsor residents may be, but dull and docile bodies they certainly are not. Nevertheless, I could not help shaking my head after an hour and twenty minute interview with Pursey. He was completely illiterate and yet he penetrated, with such alarming precision, varying relations of domination in his community that, at times I thought his arguments were drawn from Sociology or Philosophy texts. He was extremely intelligent, and he knew it:

**Interviewer:** So tell me about you education, which school and so did you go?

**Pursey:** You see in this thing now general, anything throw to me since I come say that I am a man. Anything that I buck up into, because of the life that I coming from, I know how to just adjust that and attack it and do the best of my ability, you see it? And just work it, because you see the suffering what me come up in –[ pause]– the only thing I tell you that catch me



out General, before we start talk. The only thing that beat me is my read and my write. All of my brother and sister can do their little thing. They write up their little application and write them –[ pause]– they not no high school graduate you know, but they can do their little thing.

**Interviewer:** Okay, Okay

**Pursey:** Me alone out of them, never pay no attention –[ pause]– So me not coming from no dunce background. My father was a man that can read and write good and my mother can do her thing, you see it. Just Me! Me alone! And right now to how me move when me tell people I don't good in that field they say is lie me telling. Because me read between the line. To how me talk and move towards things many people don't know that weakness (Interview Transcript #12).

Though Pursey could neither read nor write, his insights were integral to my understanding of relations of deprivation in his community and they were a catalyst for the arguments on *social death* discussed in Chapter 6. Whilst one of my main principles was to allow the informants' 'voices and choices' to influence my research decisions, my reflections showed that an almost unavoidable superiority complex was latent in my approach. This would gradually change through the realisation that I wasn't just developing knowledge on the 'object' from my own thoughts on my interactions in the field. Rather, I was learning from many who could be considered intellectuals in their own right. In many of my encounters, I was getting to know about interesting ways of viewing the world from lay philosophers, lay policy analysts, lay development specialists and lay project organisers – people who, under different life circumstances (*i.e.* experiencing different social relations) might have held PhDs.

As I began giving more space to allow participants to speak to the issues of their concern, I was getting to know more of both subject (my role and impact) and object (the experiencing of deprivation). This does not mean that there were not power relations in the field. There were many. Thus, whenever I arrived where a group of youths were hanging out the topics sometimes

changed or expletives used were sometimes reduced. These effects were as a result of the relationship I had developed: I was still setting and asking questions, still giving advice, and still a part of that world where the “bigger heads” were. My presence inevitably altered conversations and on many occasions when hanging out with varying sets of youths I deliberately pushed the discussions onto the topic of poverty or other issues relevant to the study. Perhaps more importantly, I could never escape the fact that I represented the ‘outside’ (nor should I have tried to do so) even if I aimed to be as relaxed as possible in their company. In the context of my work, an attempt at self-cleansing so as to *become* a Windsor resident myself and to completely align with their way of life would have been false and futile.

The openness and respect I was striving for (and I think I achieved to some degree) with my informants, did not mean their views were taken as unquestionable reality. Rather, I aspired to *appreciate* their opinions. I read the work of the theorists I most admire with critical care and examine them from different angles to find the points I agree or disagree with and to identify strands that are applicable or inapplicable to my work. This was how I wanted to treat my data from the field so as to recognise that it is the respondent who must everyday feel – and so also know through living it – what deprivation is like. My job was to take the material we co-produced through our encounters and try to learn critically from what they told of their experiences. My duty was to also take the ideological systems that informed their knowing under consideration and to bring critical insight to bear upon it. In this thesis therefore, I straddle the unstable representational border between getting to know from *my-self* and from the *other* (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999). How successful I have been in delivering a sound narrative is not for me to judge.

#### 4.3.3.2 Ways of Knowing Experiences

The possibility of getting to know experiences has been problematised by theorists within the postmodern tradition. For example, it has been argued that the interview's "relationship to any "real" experience is not merely unknown but in some senses unknowable" (Rapley, 2001:304; Scott, 1991; Hardin, 2003; cf. Stone-Mediatore, 1998). I have drawn some interpretive insights from these provocative critiques of the knowing social world, but I have adopted Holt's (1994:393) invaluable advice to read some aspects of individual accounts "as *if* experiences were something separate from the discourse through which it is apprehended". Bearing in mind that guidance, I posit that it is necessary to distinguish between those concepts used to characterise and *program* experiences (e.g. I am in poverty) and those narratives which describe experiences (e.g. I have not eaten for two days). My approach is to critically think of both ways of representing experiences, but I *deconstruct* the former as a discursive artefact and interrogate the latter (inside and out) from an *as if real* position. That is, the latter is seen as an experience to be critically engaged, interpreted and assessed in terms of its relationship with reigning constructs.

Drawing on Bourdieu, Foucault, Williams and a host of other critical theorists, I argue that deprivation is rooted in social relations which are papered over by or disguised within dominant conceptualisations of poverty. If this is so, then no opposition to the relations themselves is "feasible without an experience-to-be-interpreted that contradicts" the prevailing poverty discourse (Holt, 1994:394). Furthermore, a counter-discourse can only be an effective resistance to the extent that it is "resonant with the lived experience" of individuals considered poor – thus exposing the dissimulative resonations that emanate from current conceptualisations of poverty. Holt argues, and I agree, that every encounter with experiences (or every account of an experience) is necessarily read within some discursive system that gives it meaning and as such

researchers must “bear the burden of sustaining a reflexive awareness that no knowledge is transparent” (1994:394). I would add that, the fact that all knowledge (of experience) is contestable, acts to keep researchers who ascribe to this perspective on guard – it acts to keep them vigilant. Because I was aware of the precarious nature of my enterprise, I was compelled to justify my decisions, to constantly raise questions and to critically reflect on the experiences (observed and heard) that I accepted or denied as valid.

How do I practically apply this principle? An interview with Tammy provides a good illustration:

**Interviewer:** Why you say you poor?

**Tammy:** Many things, because, like when I was going to school, I never have no money and although the school near to where I live, no lunch. Sometimes is the next day before we eat anything. My parents, used to struggle bad, bad (Interview Transcript #17).

At around age 13 (Grade 8), Tammy stopped going to school. She was seen walking around streets of the tourist centre of Montego Bay in tattered clothes and social services were called. The family was assessed and officially defined as ‘poor’ and she and three of her siblings were taken in as wards of the state while the others remained home and were given financial assistance.<sup>37</sup> Based on my approach to knowing, I would not accept that the experience Tammy described is unequivocally poverty and then move on from that point. My analytical strategy with this information is to interpret her narrative as an experiencing of deprivation (that is complicit in her suffering) and then to ask a number of questions related to my role and in terms of the *natural* relations between education, money, and the determination of poverty. Thus, I could ask: from the numerous tragic experiences she has had, why did she select the one about her schooling when defining herself as poor? Fundamental to my deconstruction, is her experience’s

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<sup>37</sup> Tammy should still have been in government care, but she ran away from the Girls’ Home and now lives with her boyfriend in Windsor.

relationship or resonance with the dominant poverty definition. As a result, I ask questions such as: Why is it defined as poverty? And what benefits/deficits does this label confer? In a previous chapter, I attempted to explore the processes by which certain deprivations have come to be recognised as poverty, thereby warranting state programming and intervention. It is in response to being questioned on these processes one respondent made it clear she did not want to be *poored*.<sup>38</sup> This not only illustrates the discursive and contingent nature of poverty, but shows there are many different subject positions within the construct.

Tammy's experiences may be compared to Michelle who stopped school at age 15 (Grade 9) because her mother could not afford it. Michelle also believes she is in poverty though she is not officially defined as such (the government refuses to define her as poor). When we talked about her schooling she had similar experiences to many other Windsor residents I knew that had not gotten government aid:

**Interviewer:** Why you leave school so early then?

**Michelle:** My mother never have it to send me go school, she was working at the time and she use to throw her little partner, but I miss school many time because of no lunch money and no bus fare. She couldn't send all of we to school same time, it was she alone. So because I was older I stay home to make my brother and sister go.

**Interviewer:** So she never get no government assistance?

**Michelle:** Like PATH or so?

**Interviewer:** Yeah

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<sup>38</sup> Some aspects of the diversity in the experiencing of deprivation (that often comes to be formally or informally labeled as poverty) may be found in a comparison of the two accounts mentioned here with that of Kelly's on page 207. **Error! Reference source not found..**

**Michelle:** Many, many time she apply but she never get nothing yet. Even when she couldn't send me go school no more, she try again and they turn her down again" (Interview Transcript #24).

The government decreed that Michelle was not in poverty, yet I do not accept that she is unequivocally non-poor and move on. Why does she think she is poor? What would have happened if she was defined as such? Neither of the girls' parents could afford school fees, neither could afford lunch money so why was Michelle not 'poored' when Tammy was?

I went into the field to answer questions like these; essentially to get to know why official understandings of poverty had excluded some extreme cases of deprivation and accommodated others. In a sense then, I was hunting for the common denominator in the girls' experiences (and myriad deprivations affecting others) that would lead to an inclusive and *lived* conceptualisation of poverty. Could such a thing ever be found? My view changed partly as a result of my approach to knowledge and partly as a result of my approach to methods of data collection. I came to realise that what I was seeking (irrespective of its catholicity) would be a recalibration, a reprogramming of the dominant concept which would be blind to the relations of power within the term itself. My epistemological stance demanded a confrontation – a showdown with processes of power that lead to the labelling of certain experiences as poverty. I hope those powers have lost out and have been undermined in our contest.

I now understand that even if I could have emerged with a concrete 'lived' concept, it would have eviscerated the *difference* in subject positions. Tammy and Michelle are different – subjectivity has differently conditioned their experiencing. They could not be naturally clumped together even if they had experienced the same type of deprivation (they value different aspects of their

experiences and they feel differently about their experiences). Moreover, while its policy instruments are exclusively based on an inflexible materialistic abstraction, poverty is an extremely porous concept. Its leakages mean that places can become characterised as poor and those inhabiting such localities – though not necessarily officially classified as poor – can become its living *representatives*. These spatial relations can (and often do) unleash a torrent of virulent processes that exacerbate the material deprivations being experienced by individuals. This means that there are individuals without access to assistance because they are officially non-poor, who must nevertheless bear all the marks and stains of poverty. What kind of demonic phenomenon is this? Where does *it* come from? What and who sustains *it*? Is *it* fed by ‘society’? Is *it* being fed by *me*?

The methods currently being employed in defining and measuring poverty have their place in the battle against the *deep sufferation* being endured on a mass scale in Jamaica and elsewhere. But if, as I have argued in the previous chapter, the origins of poverty discourses in Jamaica can be traced to certain historical experiences of deprivation that contributed to widespread social suffering and mass protests, why are those experiences no longer its referents? Instead of chasing phantoms, I wanted to know: What is the history of how we presently think of poverty? Why are some differences (and similarities) dissolved and others hypostatized in processes of constructing poverty? What do these inclusions and exclusions mean for experiences in people’s everyday lives? I would only get to know this by (a) questioning my standpoint on the experiences I accept as *if* separate from the discourse and (b) reading the narratives containing those experiences as complex and contested discursive productions. My methods of *getting to know* are by all measures imperfect, but I think they have helped me to understand more of the subject/object.

#### 4.3.4 ...*With Representation*

The language of 'knowledge' and of 'experience' has so far been used, but the *stories* told on the pages of this thesis are the substance of varying vehicles and varying forms of *representation*. Representation is a word stuffed full of meanings and in what follows I try to excavate a few of its denotations so as to describe some of what I have done in writing about my encounters in the field.

I start by making four methodological statements on the way I perceive the *representing* done in my work. Firstly, to adapt Denzin's (1994:500) view, I believe that in the social sciences there is only representation, because nothing speaks for itself. Secondly, research is an inscription practice and as such, its written representation "is a continuation of fieldwork rather than a transparent record of past experiences in the field" (Tedlock, 2003:165). Thirdly, how we as researchers write our representations and the analytical procedures we apply to our data, "reveal our theoretical assumptions and presumptions about relations between discourse and meaning" (Mishler, 1986:vi). And finally, this thesis provides a written and theoretically informed interpretation of the experiencing of deprivation in Windsor. This representation has been produced as much from an 'authorial presence' as from the 'lived realities of the field'. As such, it is essential to narrate the 'representational tensions' encountered at the analytical border where the two meet and mingle (Gubrium & Holstein, 1999).

My understanding constructs all the stages of producing a qualitative thesis as a holistic endeavour and it places emphasis on showing how data was collected and how analysis was



done.<sup>39</sup> The analytical trajectory of my work could only have followed the course it did because I tried my best to take stock of and reflect on the things I did on each day that I collected information related to deprivation in Windsor. Indeed, I learned a lot about 'do's and don'ts' from going over my interviews and diary entries. Ultimately, this practice was integral to the re-orienting of my movements in the field and they would prove to be equally vital when conducting my formal analysis.<sup>40</sup> In determining how I would generate a suitable response from the body of data I mixed and matched various techniques as suggested by a number of theorists including, Kavanaugh (Ayres *et al*, 2003), Huberman and Miles (1994) Opie (1992) and Mauthner and Doucet (2003). The process is summarised below:

- (i) After transcribing the recordings, I appended what I thought about each interview. Then, after pouring over the transcripts multiple times, I created five themes based partly on my research question and partly on the information in the transcripts. These themes were: (a) Perceptions of Poverty; (b) Place (Impact of Community on Life Chances and Experiences); (c) Youths (Attitudes, Behaviours, Challenges, Opportunities and Needs); (d) Resources, Needs and Difficulties (Perceptions of Community/Personal Needs and Hardships); and (e) Violence and Miscellaneous.
- (ii) I 'de-contextualised' participants' statements on the various topics and categorised them accordingly. They were also partially translated from the Jamaican dialect, Patwa, in preparation for usage in the final text.<sup>41</sup> This was done in a format that allowed columns for: Informant Name, Interview Number, Question Asked and Response. Where one person made multiple comments on a single topic, each remark was noted separately as this allowed for identification of continuities or contradictions.

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<sup>39</sup> This discussion, except where specifically mentioned, does not refer to the autophotographic exercise. Chapter 7 contains a description of the analytical techniques applied to the pictorial data.

<sup>40</sup> Most of the practices and reflections done over the months in the field were in one way or another analytical. Formal analysis therefore refers to the varying procedures related to my conversion of the data into the academic format presented.

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix E for a description of Patwa and specifics related to my translation of it.

- (iii) Two additional columns were placed on the 'analysis sheet' adjacent to each statement. These spaces were to allow for reflections made earlier (if there were any) and current thoughts specifically on the de-contextualised statements. This was drawn from feminist reflexive methods used by Mauthner and Doucet (2003:419). These spaces meant I could briefly comment on a number of issues that were relevant to each statement (e.g. noting deconstructive questions that relate to it or how I might have impacted on the response).
- (iv) I did not only categorise those statements I saw as 'significant' as suggested by Kavanaugh (Ayres *et al*, 2003:874). Instead, heeding advice from both Power (2004) and Järvinen (2000) to be critical of my propensities to favour or marginalise certain accounts, I ensured that as long as a comment was made on a topic it was classified. This turned out to be quite important as some of those points I thought irrelevant or some of the transcripts I had marginalised proved to be quite helpful.
- (v) Again, I went through the motley group of papers and drawing books I call my Field Diary, this time picking out the key conversations, incidents and events which I found relevant to the theme's topic and appended a short annotation of each to the categories. In this case I was forced to choose those reflections/observations that were 'significant' due to the number of encounters that had been recorded. Also, there are many incidents that I deemed too sensitive to include.
- (vi) This meant that I would now have a comprehensive collection of data for the themes that had been carved out. The 'analysis sheets' were printed out for each category and placed on the walls of my study room and a second set of copies were made to work from. I answered critical questions raised about the statements (for e.g. as discussed in pages 128 to 129) by re-contextualising them. That is, I went back into the full transcript to aid with my questioning of the individual statements. Then, I tried to identify and examine the differences and similarities from different respondents and I searched for connections

across the categories to see whether and in what ways they were linked since many of the statements were classified under more than one theme.

- (vii) I again reflected on the central research endeavour that had been thrown up from my experiences in the field: how does the official poverty machinery relate to the ways people live in the community? From this I generated some specific inquiries that could be answered from the themed 'collection of data', the 'new' analytical materials I had produced and by drawing on various concepts from the literature. Finally, *I (re)constructed a narrative of what I considered to be the nature of relationship between the poverty construct and the way deprivation was being experienced in Windsor.*

To use the words of Tedlock (2003:165), I think of the representational work I have described here as both a "process and product". Having outlined the process, I now turn to the product. I will make four comments on the presentation of this narrative:

- (i) Firstly, I have employed a style which, to a large extent, has written references to my *feelings* (in the direct sense) out of the main body of this work. The main exception to this is the use of some of my observations, experiences and reflections in sections of the empirical chapters that follow. This autoethnographic piecing together of my encounters is therefore not only meant to compensate for being unable to include salient events (from my field diary) in the text, but also to declare openly, the extent of my indebtedness to and dependence on feminist reflexivity methods and critical thought in general.
- (ii) Secondly, I have worked much of my methodology into the three empirical chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) and so much of the information that might have been detailed in this section has only been glossed over. I did that mainly because I saw that my talk, other actions and my position inescapably impacted upon analytical outcomes and to remove the necessary interconnectedness of researcher, context and respondent in constructing the narrative would have devalued the position I have taken.

- (iii) Thirdly, I have aimed, in the vast majority of the quoted references from my informants, to present both the interviewer's questions and the interviewees' answers. In doing this, I have responded affirmatively to Rapley's (2001:306) appeal to include both the researcher's and the respondent's talk in representations. Plain to see then (alongside those that may be satisfactory) are some of the leading, clumsy, or unclear questions that aided in the co-produced accounts. Does this not open me up to criticism? That was the point. My practice was not unproblematic and the interviewees did not unilaterally, and as if by magic, summon up their thoughts on their experiences and spill them out. The interview is an *accomplishment*. I wanted to portray it that way, warts and all.
- (iv) Finally, my writing style slips backward and forward into theory, methodology and *evidence*. Thus, I have made the business of representation even more complex by interweaving disparate analytical artefacts into the arguments that comprise each chapter. This was not at all a planned approach. It grew out of a kind of familial relationship that developed with the data as I was working through the different analytical stages. In writing my responses to the research question, I tried to explore creative ways of cultivating the data and nurturing it so as to get the best narrative from my interactions with it. A *bricolage* of ideas, theoretical concepts and writing styles was the result.

### **4.3.5 ...With My Limits**

#### **4.3.5.1 The Partiality of Boundary Trespassing**

I have not located my work in any single domain – neither in terms of a specific theoretical position nor a specific field of study. I repeatedly, in this way, transgress against long established boundaries, moving across different cherished (though increasingly less encysted) disciplinary spaces to borrow (or maybe *take*) insights from disparate bastions of critical thought. This is not

an original approach by any means, but because my ruminations inescapably operate within the parameters of certain questions, the analysis pushes up against (and sometimes spills over) the extremities of what may be satisfactory to any one speciality. Apart from the multiple theoretical strongholds I have invaded in doing battle with the poverty apparition, I engage, among others, Philosophy, Anthropology, History, Sociology, Art and Geography. This practice appeals to the long recognised multidimensionality of poverty and to the fact that it needs to be approached from a number of angles. But there are weaknesses here as well. Like all accounts, this work cannot completely accommodate all aspects of the problem. Any of the traditions I have engaged will be able to find limits. I can never fully satisfy any one of them. For example, a sociologist with knowledge of Windsor might say:

Kurt, you say your topic is "Social Relations in a Jamaican Community". The Windsor Girls' Home sits at the heart of Windsor and affects it in multiple ways. It is at the centre of symbolic exchanges which ascribe worth to the community. For example, the (internal and external) perceptions and reactions to the routines surrounding that institution must feed into Windsor's culture, therefore also into Windsor's social relations. Yet, the Home is peripheral to your study. Why?

This is a very valid indication of one of my analytical limits. My response (perhaps inadequate for our passionate sociologist) would be:

The point is correct and I would add to what has been intimated in the question with an acknowledgement of the fact that the Girls' Home directly (and unfairly for most residents), intensifies individual and communal misery by staining Windsor *in toto* with a bellicose 'imaginative geography' based on the actions of very few residents. It may be argued that there are issues of complacency/acquiescence here as well. However, there are multiple contradictory forces at work in this that are too labyrinthine to deal with now. Unfortunately, in my interviews I did not ask questions about the Girls' Home and how it affected life (though I often saw the effects) and that limits my ability to explore its influence. The responses that were relevant to the Girls' Home emerged as subtext when talking about violence, idling, problems of the youths, *etc.* I do recognise that the Home needed greater attention as it is an important tributary to the malignant discourse that fuels symbolic and

material privation. Nevertheless, the analyses I could bring to bear on the Girls' Home (mostly from observations and informal conversations with staff and those men who frequent its gate) would explicate the community's relations with the police and issues of sexual violence. Both of these are tied into relations of deprivation, but they would not provide further clarity on my key research problems.

The second point I want to make is not meant to dismiss the criticism. Research addressing its concerns could only add to understanding of lived experiences in Windsor. What I want to do is show the necessary existence of partiality in any research enterprise. The research question that informed my analysis directed me to the sources of power that shape discourses especially as they relate to the constitution and effects of the poverty construct. This means my objective was to destabilise the discourse itself and to disrupt (via exposure) the ease with which privative relations dispense suffering and hardship while hiding behind such convenient *facts* as, 'all of them is rapists', 'all of them is thief' or 'all of them lazy', and so on. For instance, I look at how the leakages of poverty seep into spatiality to produce multiple deprivations. The Home then is significant as one source of imprecation in the arsenal of symbolic dominations. But I was more concerned about the storage place of these weapons of misery. In relation to the Girls' Home itself, I must also say that there needs to be an urgent investigation of how the government arranges care for minors and the manner in which the strategy of 'capture', 'contain' and 'manage' is substituted for rescuing, protecting and nurturing the most vulnerable in our society.

To trespass again, I *take* from Kondo who argues that no approach, neither one based on *bricolage* nor one based on any single discipline, can be exhaustive. None will ever "sufficiently illuminate the inextricability of subject formation from social forces such as gender, race, history, culture, and political economy" (Kondo, 2006:128). What I have tried to do is use as many means as possible to lance the heart of the powers that drive impoverishment. This means to the varying disciplines it will inevitably be only a partial representation of social experience. I do hope it has at least been able to address comprehensively and tear away some of the *mystique* of poverty.

#### 4.3.5.2 The Gender Deficiency

Much of my mode of critique and much of my writing style has been influenced by feminist thought and feminist endeavours. Both post-colonial Caribbean feminisms and feminisms more generally have been instructive in my attempts to oppose the dominations deployed through *poverty*. Yet, *Gender as a category of analysis/resistance* (Scott, 1986) has not featured in my struggle to nuisance and dislocate settled conventions of thinking about the antinomies extant in the concept of poverty. My work is unavoidably gendered in that it appears to have a neutral tone but I am entirely aware that the categories available from disciplines which construct *topics* of research “do not necessarily correspond with the categories that are meaningful in women’s lives” (Devault, 1990:98). Also, I have been more influenced by predominantly male informal interaction (though formal interviewing was more balanced). Most of my unscheduled “free time” in the community was spent with different sets of male youths at different hang out spots. Young women in Windsor seemed to spend more time indoors and this made unscheduled engagements and informal group interactions with them less likely. I accepted my seeming exclusion too easily. This is undoubtedly the limitation I regret most.

Antrobus (1989:19) writing on the experiences of Caribbean women with structural adjustment emphasised that to deal with an economic crisis, a “package of policies” was delivered that was “grounded in a gender ideology which is deeply and fundamentally exploitative of women’s time, labour, and sexuality”. This of course seems to go against popular discourses which tell Jamaicans that “Black Woman and Child” (Sizzla, *Black Woman & Child*, 1997) are sacred in our society. To take the words of one extremely powerful song “she’s a precious, precious, precious, Princess Black. That’s why we always, always, always say she tougher than a rock” (Eddie Fitzroy, *Princess Black*, 1997). While rightly celebratory, these songs should encourage

introspection. There may be more consonance between impoverishing policy and popular praises than meets the eye. To problematise the thinking that I am often guilty of, I would ask: Why must our beloved *princess* be tougher than a rock? And what happens when our prized granite breaks? Is our Princess Black inherently precious or is she precious because of what she does/has done? Some of the best and most loved lyrics in Jamaica tell us that our mothers are great because they have been built by the *system* to struggle and fail; still they have actually managed to overcome while bearing the punishing weight of the world on their shoulders. Such songs are usually guaranteed bestsellers. Yet, many melodies about our princesses cannot avoid making reference to the prurient and promiscuous “ole dutty gyal dem” (*i.e.* the dirty women) who party at night instead of fighting to feed their children. These binaries must always be present in our minds (even if not directly mentioned) for our ballads of praises to find true resonance. So how do we structure women’s identities and women’s roles? How do the prevailing discourses push deprivations behind women’s ‘frock tails’? And does *difference* within and between our practices of gendering sustain forces of domination which produce women as not only children bearing, but also pain and *sufferation* bearing machines?

Looking back at my interviews with mothers (some as young as 15), I was aware of increased gender identity work around some issues (both from the interviewees and myself). It is little wonder because there are harsh cultural penalties for being seen to be a bad mother. In exchanges, I found myself naturally gravitating towards a valorisation of these projections. I found myself reifying the discourses which construct women as the main survival *materiel* in the war against poverty, or rather in the struggle to maintain the relations of domination that create and exacerbate deprivation while only attacking its immediate effects. It is too easy for us as a society to engineer (through *gendering difference*) and then exploit women’s socially manufactured pain



bearing strength – “their willingness and ability to cope, to make ends meet, to make whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to ensure the survival of their family”. This has for too long been a part of the history of Caribbean people (Antrobus, 1989:26).

I was inclined to this category of analysis and yet, I did not develop ways of exploring those inclinations. I was afraid. I cowered to the limits imposed by manhood. I was fearful of falling prey to the critique that I was trying to ‘speak for’ women when I would never really understand their experiences. And I feared not being able to do justice to a cause I held dear. This seems to me now, to be the kind of thinking which flirts with the idea of opposing domination and which courts it, but in the end capitulates to the benefits of the *natural* order of things and thus confirms those inequalities that have been insinuated into *difference*. Was I not in a squatter community trying to study their sufferings? When have I ever experienced that? In this instance I turned away from the main principles of my research to follow where the ‘voices and choices’ of my informants led and to oppose oppression when I found it. Gender is a sensitive area, my investigation would have been extremely difficult and there is no guarantee I would have been able to uncover and resist the powers within the poverty construct that weigh on gendering. On reflection, I believe I should have tried harder.

### **4.3.6 ...With the Ethics of Respect**

#### **4.3.6.1 Respecting the Process**

In one of my earliest interviews, I gave my informant the consent form which succinctly described my affiliation, my topic and the terms of our engagement (confidentiality, anonymity, use of data and the right to withdraw consent). I already had his verbal consent as I always made detailed

declarations before presenting the form. This respondent told me he didn't want the form he was happy to just do the interview. I implored that he read and sign the form so we could both be certain his rights and my responsibilities. He took the form and spent some time with it and then he whispered that he couldn't read or write and so could not sign the form. Both of us were embarrassed. The problem was that I had embarrassed him. He might have told me that anyway or he might not have. But it was for him to decide. With my insistence I forced him into an uncomfortable position. Surely, this is not the best way to respect informants. Does informed consent mean signing a form or understanding your rights as a participant in research? Why did I need the form signed? What would I do with it afterwards?

I resolved to continue with my verbal explanations and then offer the form to the respondents in an open way ("would you like both of us to sign an agreement about this?"). The dilemma with this is that, I figured out quite early, no one bothered with the consent form when I did not present it as a requirement of my research. Nevertheless, I always offered, because I felt I owed my informants the right to have the choice. I have tried to be respectful in other aspects of the research process. For example, all the informants have been given pseudonyms so as to protect their anonymity. Additionally, to increase choice and openness I offered flexibility about when and where interviews were conducted (their homes, my car or the church/basic school when I could arrange to have private access). Respect for the wishes, rights and contributions of all those who participated was placed at the centre of my practices so as to minimise potential harm (in accordance with the 'do no harm' principle) and to avoid causing offence where possible.

#### 4.3.6.2 Respecting Persons

Some days in the field were better than others. I had fun sitting on the corners hearing jokes about all sorts of things, I enjoyed watching the football matches and was particularly proud to announce to the youth club that they had won the prize for the team with the best behaviour at the Salem Windball Cricket Competition they had participated in. I marvelled at the industry some of the men and women employed in securing their livelihoods. But I was in Windsor to do research. I was there to *find* poverty and this means that most of the good and great things I saw would not (and did not) make it into my representation of the community. This may be due to the way that the poor and impoverishment have been constructed through history. Much like other accounts then, the narrative I present largely concerns dearth, denigration, distress, dispossession. There are only glimpses of the strength, the pride and the ambition I saw in the community. Does this respect the people who have shared with me? How do I write on the mixed bag of things I found? How do I represent it? Is there even space within a discussion on poverty to account for good in the life of 'the other'?

Whenever I heard about the hardship, the suffering and the pain that individuals encountered I would think: "good information, job well done". I particularly remember Tammy with tears in her eyes telling me about the two times she was almost raped since she arrived in Windsor. I was brought to tears myself and the sensitivity of the issue made me ask her if she wanted me to erase that aspect of our talk. She said no. I felt good about that. I felt I had respected her by offering to keep this extremely moving account private. I remember replaying the recording and thinking: *this is excellent stuff*. But what was so excellent about it? The fact that she felt comfortable enough to bare her soul to me? The fact that I would be able to use these revelations? The fact that it might impress readers if I integrated them into my writing? Exactly

what was so *excellent* about it? This was a moment of hurt for Tammy and even for me. And yet later, once I had forgotten about my emotions and started thinking *academically*, the resonance of that moment had changed: “this is excellent stuff”. There I was basking in human suffering. At times when I reflect on my practices and my feelings on those practices, I wonder whether a researcher (such as myself) is not analogous to a parasite, a leech, a savage predator that stalks the vulnerable and ravenously feeds on their pain. The quick rebuttal is: “in everything I did I tried to respect them”. Is that apologia enough? How do we truly respect those that have given of themselves without respecting and being open about *feelings* in our writing? Should we not bring *emotional data* to bear on our scholarly work? Should we not give our often plain scholarly work some emotional texture? Is that not the best way to show respect? *It is maybe too feminine.*

There are also moments when I assuage my guilt with the hope that by using the materials I have collected to construct a powerful narrative (even if it is impassive) which is able to disorient and problematise the forces that create and sustain human suffering, then this is also truly showing respect. And even if my analyses are fundamentally flawed but they can be in some way used to turn the gaze upon and destabilise the relations of deprivation, then that also would be respecting my ethics and respecting the persons who gave of themselves. Would it not?

In taking an autoethnographic approach to my methodology I have sought to slightly compensate for the omissions and the offences I might have caused in the representations made in the main body of this work. Following Derrida then, I hope to expose into the open the limits of my own thinking “in order to draw attention to them, to make them the theme of research” (Derrida quoted in Scott, 2005:130). I want to show the tensions, the discord, the joys and the sorrows of my ways of knowing to encourage progress towards better ways of finding knowledge. This is important

because (as I hope the thesis will show) we as academics cannot think about properly interrogating and resisting the relations of deprivation (currently being defined as poverty) without first critiquing the discursive systems which structure our thoughts.

The experiences I draw on throughout are only partly my own. They also belong to those who welcomed me into their lives and were generous enough to allow me to, in a way, bequeath my opinions of their lives to the readers of this work. My aspiration is that these accounts will be used to rattle imagined integrity of the walls of power and to irritate out of slumber those of us who believe we do not play a part in maintaining systems of domination. I hope this desire aligns with the expectations of those who have shared with me. I hope I have been sufficiently respectful to all of them. But, I do not know.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **The Quest for the Missing 'Local': A Reflexive Critique of Knowledge Production in Poverty Research**

## 5.1. Introduction

In much of the recent participatory literature, there is the proposition that “listening to the voices of households who are poor can provide a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions of poverty” and may facilitate the researcher’s exposure to the realities of the difficulties of daily lives of those experiencing deprivation (Baker Collins, 2005:10). However, despite concerted efforts and claims to the contrary (Brock, 1999), within this tradition participants are generally unable to influence the conceptualisation of poverty itself (Lister, 2004:4; Moore *et al*, 1998:3). If the intent and the result of investigations is the ascertainment of “a deeper understanding of poverty” (Robb, 1999; Baker Collins, 2005), then the point of participatory research, ‘in reality’, seems to be a search for insights into a pre-defined space. Thus, when Renard and Wint (2007), in their proposal for a *new perspective on poverty in the Caribbean*, reported that the “increased interest in qualitative methods reflects changes in the approaches to and understanding of poverty”, they countermand that position by going on to explain that quick quantitative indicators “tell us *what is*” while the more in-depth time consuming assessments “tells us more – it tells us what we are doing about it” and what the poor are thinking (2007:89-90, emphasis added). The “what is” in this context is infinitely more powerful than it seems (or the authors may care to admit), as it unequivocally asserts a reality of who is poor or non-poor. Therefore, the researcher steps into the field heavily laden with an ‘unchecked’ set of assumptions about the target group or community, which inevitably impacts upon every aspect of the study. These preconceived notions shape and limit the ways in which deprived groups are able to influence the conceptualisation of poverty and the knowledge gained about it. Without reflexive interrogations of these seemingly benign epistemological and methodological doctrines, the poor will continue to be marginal in the evaluation of their circumstances, even where it appears or it is claimed that they are integral to the process.

Insofar as participation can be viewed as an invaluable (though always flawed) contribution to ways of researching and knowing, then its worth is “not the methods but the methodological context of their application”. Particularly since “methods can be used quite differently according to the choice researchers make” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995:1667). Consequently, participation is not being critiqued in this chapter for the noble principle of seeking to maximise dialogical engagement and empowerment for marginalised groups in research, but mainly for the way that the end result tends to be represented. Specifically, the fact that often researchers on deprivation and poverty (such as myself) return from the field with what is at best *co-production* and label it a direct *reflection* of the poor's views – *poverty from the perspective of the poor*. It is the processes within this aspect of participatory practice which are at issue here.

The chapter begins by introducing and analysing my own attempts to use the participatory method as a means of *finding* ‘a local definition of poverty’ – and using this ‘lived view’ to critique the dominant approach. A number of anomalies that emerged from the two youth focus group sessions are discussed. The focus then turns to the discovered protean and polysemous nature of poverty and this is explored through four individual narratives with an emphasis on how these accounts resonate with identity construction and with society-wide discourses on deprivation. The final section of the chapter, critiques the use of *development* (as opposed to open-ended social progress) as the ideological impetus for the semiotics of deprivation. Throughout this chapter, emphasis has been placed on social relations and their role in structuring and informing both the experience of poverty and the possibilities for its interpretation. Particularly relevant are those relations regarding the researcher's role in production of what comes to be ‘known’ about the *poverty* construct and the constructed *poor*.



## **5.2. The Antinomies of Participatory Knowledge Production in Deprived Communities**

In response to the criticism that the views of the poor have been excluded from the processes that inform official understandings of poverty and the design of policy responses, participation has become a shibboleth of the anti-poverty orthodoxy. Indeed, “the past decade has witnessed the ubiquity of participation across the globe, involving efforts to bring more marginalised people into the decision-making processes that affect them” (Mohan, 2007:779). Though it seems intuitive that research into poverty would seek to empower and incorporate the perspectives of those who experience its worst effects, as Robert Chambers (1995:185) recognises, “a person who is not poor who pronounces on what matters to those who are poor is in a trap” and will inevitably struggle to reconstruct an already developed view of reality to reflect what poor people indicate to be theirs. Accordingly, the logistics of inclusivity are irreducibly more complex than they appear, and as the cacoethic reliance on the participation paradigm as a reflection of local voices has grown to subsume almost all developmental and anti-poverty interventions, many of its deficiencies have been identified and decried. Perhaps the most widely acknowledged indictment is the claim that the participatory approach “constantly omits an analysis of the structural and the political” (Cleaver, 1999:608) and consequently, may exacerbate and reinforce existing power inequalities within groups/communities (Agarwal, 2001; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2005). However, equally significant and yet hardly discussed is the fact that the poor are rarely ever allowed to truly direct the construction of the meaning of poverty and inform its conceptual underpinnings. It is essential to ask: how far is it possible for them to do so and how should their contributions be represented?

My research project was initially envisaged as a corrective to academic hubris which 'objectively' approaches the subject of 'who is poor' as a closed question and so duly dispenses the labels poor/non-poor as a matter of course. The starting point and focus was therefore a problematisation of the concept of poverty using both lived experiences and autochthonous conceptualisations through dialogical engagement with individuals from the notorious squatter community of Windsor. The main assumption was that there existed in Jamaican society and by extension, within its particular localities, 'folk' concepts of poverty which stood in contrast to official definitions. These were assumed to exist due to my familiarity with the culture – my upbringing there, regular visits, close relations with many deprived persons and my academic and personal interest in the popular art and music. There was no illusion that there was a single codified and structured definition to be found and picked up (though reference is made here to the search for *the* missing local). The assumption was that the narratives of suffering and hardship would be diverse and complex, but within these there might/should be a central logic – a *mediating concept* – through which the accounts and experiences of deprivation were projected. These localised interpretations, once found, explored, and fitted around a *lived monad*, were expected to have transformational implications for research and policy agendas. As such, the challenge was to develop a research apparatus capable of cooperatively building/making a "participating community" (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995),<sup>42</sup> then *finding* and exploring the folk knowledge that exists within. The methodological literature was consulted so as to reconcile participatory tools (e.g. Pretty *et al* (1995); Slocum *et al* (1995); Baker Collins (2005); Jayakaran (2007)) with critical revisions of practice (Cornwall, 2003; Cornwall & Pratt, 2003). This moved the design beyond an endeavour to ease the tension between "emphasising improvisation and innovation versus rigour and consistency" (Cornwall & Pratt, 2003:40). Rather, there was a keen interest in arriving at a reversal of conventional understandings of the role of participants in

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<sup>42</sup> Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1673) assert that participating communities are not "born" but "made".

constructing poverty meanings. Thus, the community would not be providing a 'deeper understanding' within a predefined space, but would be employed in a revisionary enterprise aimed at procuring *their* indigenous definition as drawn from their discussions and contributions. The result, it was hoped, would be the extraction of 'genuine local knowledge' which would then be translated carefully and reflexively worked into an academic format.

As part of the implementation of this methodology, a number of participatory focus group sessions were planned (and some were conducted). The intention with these sessions was to begin the search for organic notions of impoverishment, through structured tasks (diagramming, wealth ranking, *etc.*) that would then form the basis of open dialogue. Two such focus group sessions were organised with the youths of Windsor and they are concentrated on in this section.

### **5.2.1 YFG1: Poverty as Material Need**

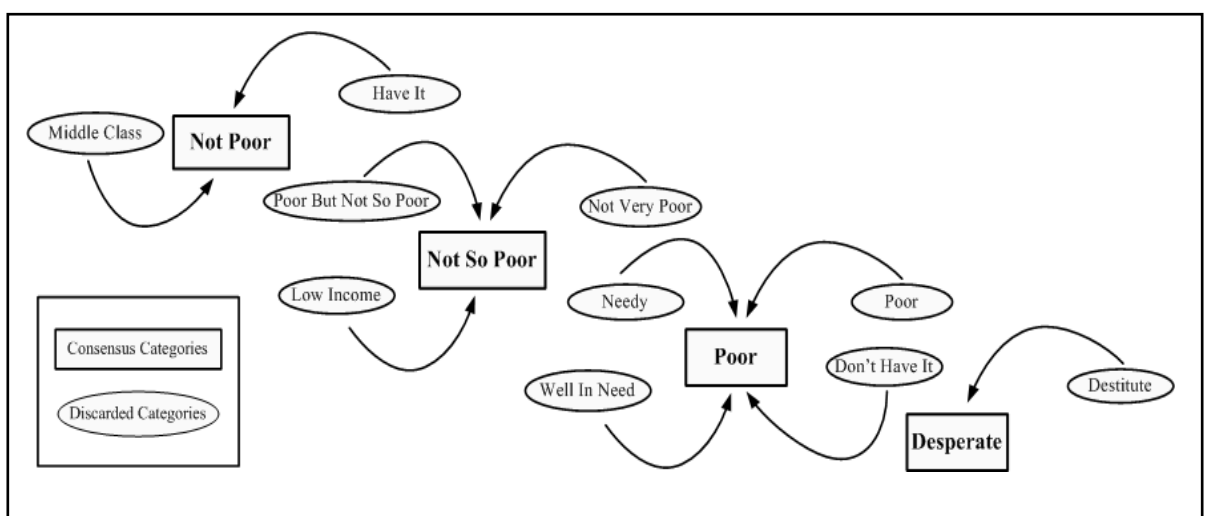
In both youth focus group sessions (YFG1 and YFG2) participants were first asked to write down whether or not they were poor and why they thought so. No statistical significance was being sought after, nor was there an expectation that the explanations would provide conclusive views on poverty. Instead, this exercise was designed to get the participants to think about poverty, using themselves as references. It was believed that this self-perception would be useful in identifying some of the ways poverty was generally thought about. In the first of the forums (YFG1), 13 youths were in attendance, and as indicated in Table 5:1 below, the responses gave the impression that overwhelmingly, poverty was being conceived by these youths as causally linked to material need.

**Table 5:1 Self-Perception of the Windsor Youths in YFG1 in Relation to Poverty**

	Are You Poor?			
	Yes		No	No Answer
<b>No. of responses</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Reasons</b>	Lack of material resources/needs (e.g. food/ money/ job/ water)	Perception of life experiences (e.g. others have it harder)	Wants/needs are met (e.g. can finance myself/can get what I want)	

(Source: YFG1 Worksheet)

The participants then worked together in teams (they asked to do the tasks with friends as opposed to individually) to identify the different 'classes' of people in Windsor. They were told to make the distinctions using their own terms which would then be collapsed into 'consensus categories'. This resulted in 14 separate, but overlapping classifications from which there emerged an agreement on four distinct groups: *Not Poor*, *Not So Poor*, *Very Poor* and *Desperate* (this is depicted in Figure 5:1). The decision making process on arriving at the consensus categories followed the same general pattern – that is, the perceived level of access to material resources was debated and negotiated as justification for choosing the appropriate label for the different groups.

**Figure 5:1 Classification by Consensus of Windsor's Residents**

(Source: Summary sheet from classification exercise and discussion, YFG1)

Another task was for participants to consider the living conditions of impoverished individuals in Windsor so as to describe and rank the different types of poor people in their community. The congruity in the labels and explanations was instructive as it gave the impression that these youths possessed a well developed sense of the socio-economic composition of their surroundings. The amiable discussions that followed cemented that assessment and as with the other activities, the common denominator in most of the categories was material wellbeing. The convergence of ideas is depicted in Table 5:2.

**Table 5:2 Categorisation and Description of Windsor's 'Poor'**

Tasha/Paul		Candice/Karen	
Desperate	Don't have nothing at all	Desperate	Yearning for things
Poor	Have little but needy	Poor	Find food, but no clothing
Needy	Have house but no food	Well in Need	Food, shelter and clothing (tiny salary )
Very Poor	Have no shelter, food or clothing of their own	Low Income	Find very little food, can't pay bills and school fees
Not So Poor	Have house, food but financial problem (e.g. school fee)	Not So Poor	Can find food, shelter and can hardly pay bills
Suffering	Suffering from many things (health etc.)		
Low Income	Enough for your needs alone		
Bangles/Rennae		Michelle/Noella	
Poor	Have a little	Desperate	When you want things and you don't even know how to get them
Desperate	Well in need of everything	Very Poor	When you don't have anything at all
Suffering	Always hungry	Poor	When you want things and most times you can't afford it financially
Suffering a Little	Not always hungry	Not So Poor	Can find a little but not everything (e.g. light, water, road etc.)
Dirty	Live bad and need material things		
Baller/Cherry		Ryan/Tango/Kelly	
Desperate	---	Destitute	Need things that they can't have
Poor/Needy	---	Very Poor	Lack of everything that they should have
Low Income	---	Needy	Want some things and cannot afford it
Not So Poor	---		

(Source: YFG1 Worksheet)

At the end of the session a map was commissioned which would be based on the findings of the results of the discussion (depicting the poverty categories, the facilities of the community, etc.)

and three youths volunteered to become lay cartographers. The aborted plan was for each focus group to produce a map that would provide for comparisons.<sup>43</sup>

Despite a brief foray into two different ways of thinking about the impoverished, (see the *Dirty* and *Suffering* categories in Table 5:2 above), the accord that presented poverty as primarily based on the extent of material lack, remained largely unperturbed. The discussions on *Dirty* and *Suffering* had revealed that alternative notions of deprivation did exist among these youths, but any excavation and thorough exploration of new and unique insights into poverty would have to take place in another setting, on another day. This group, in this context, was unanimous in its avowal to a resource-based understanding of poverty.

### **5.2.2 The Value of Orthodox Views in the Participatory Epistemology**

While re-reading the notes, worksheets and reflections from YFG1, a number of interesting and perplexing issues emerged; many of these could not be cauterised using the principles drawn from the participatory approach that had been imbibed. In the first place, the youths of Windsor are notoriously loathed in the parish of St. Ann. Individuals within and outside the community described them with terms such as “ignorant,”<sup>44</sup> “vulgar”, “out of control” and “beyond help”. Despite those warnings, care was taken to ensure that each meeting was inclusive in its composition (both genders and youths of different social standing in the community). With an expectation of disagreement and conflict (Pretty *et al*, 1995), detailed preparations had been made to diffuse arguments and draw important lessons from the differences that arose. As it occurred, there was no need for this type of planning. Though some of the persons who had been

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<sup>43</sup> For a scanned reproduction of the map, see page 106.

<sup>44</sup> In this context ignorance denoted more than a lack of knowledge. This stigma carries with it the expectation that its bearer has a propensity for violence and cannot be controlled.

identified as disruptive were in attendance, the meeting was extremely congenial and as a result, it was not the points of divergence that would have to be the focus of analysis. Rather, it was the *prima facie* 'natural' consensus that had emerged. Initially, the perplexities that arose did not lead to questionings of structure of the session or the consensual predilections of the pre-planned exercises. Instead, the main concern was the value of the data since very little in it could be viewed as unorthodox or outside the reigning paradigm. It was expected that there would be some congruence with dominant perspectives, but what did this unanimity mean for the research? Why had this topic which had generated so much discord in both academic and popular discourses been so unanimously and confidently resolved? In participatory epistemology, it is argued that "learning comes from exceptions, oddities, discrepancies, dissenters, rather than averages" (Francis, 2001:77). Yet, in this case there were scarce pickings from which to build knowledge by deliberately looking for, noticing and investigating, "contradictions, anomalies, and differences" (Chambers, 1994a:1254).

Far from confirming my assumption that communities hold within them a local/popular conception which contradicted dominant perspectives on poverty, at this early test, the thesis was almost unequivocally rejected. From the written tasks as well as the visual and verbal interaction it was obvious that these youths understood poverty from a materialistic point of view. The sentiment that poverty is "when you don't have no money to get the things that you need" (Tasha, YFG1 Worksheet) was universally accepted by this group. This conceptualisation is central to the Jamaican government's approach to poverty as informed by the vast majority of theorists from various disciplines writing on the issue (this was demonstrated in Chapter 3). The problem emerges here because proponents of participatory methods, quite often, valorise a "reversal of learning", where "scientific constructs" are rejected in favour "of local technical, physical and social knowledge" (Chambers, 1994a). YFG1 had no such dichotomy.

There is little doubt about the good intentions behind this epistemological predilection towards finding dissenting views in communities. Many adherents to participation make an admirable effort to act as a corrective to a tradition which, *in absentia*, designs and imposes a 'reality' on marginalised groups. Nevertheless, this may in practice come to constitute a shift that swings research from one detrimental position (the *scientific community* knows best) to an equally untenable one (the *local community* knows best) (Cleaver, 1999:605). This transformation is particularly harmful since it essentialises the false distinction between missing/hidden 'local knowledge' and dominant 'scientific constructs' (Pigg, 1996; Green, 2000; Walley, 2002). As Green (2000:73) suggests, what people anywhere know generally includes large amounts of scientific knowledge in addition to other local understandings of their specific economic and social environments.

Two questions must be raised here. Firstly, what does it mean for an attempt to identify and explore indigenous concepts when 'folk wisdom' mirrors 'scientific knowledge'? And secondly, should the perceptions of 'the poor' be taken as credible or should the conformity to dominant strains of thought be discredited as a reflection of various power relations? The imbroglio these questions create serves to expose an epistemological antinomy that is inexorably rooted at the heart of the participatory valuation of *the poor's knowledge*. For instance, in elaborating his "*they do it*" principle, Chambers (1994a:1254) describes a situation where, "local people themselves, generate and own the outcomes and also learn". He argues that this "requires the confidence *that they can do it*". Yet, Chambers has also noted a tendency for "lowers" (participants) to mirror the reality of "uppers" (researchers and officials), "and generate, select and distort information to fit what they believe uppers want, approve and will reward" (1994b:14). In this way, argues Chambers (1995:198), "the prudent poor and the weak perpetuate the fantasies and fallacies of the powerful and strong". Thus, the knowledge of the poor is to be accepted as valid to the extent



that it fulfils the ideographic zeal (Sayer, 2000) or maintains sufficient distance from 'scientific' or dominant perspectives.

Paulo Freire's works (1990, 1998), which are recognised as antecedents of current participatory theory and practice, have contributed invaluable insights on aiding the oppressed to struggle out of oppression. However, while Freire argued that the knowledge of oppressed people could be valuable in liberating them, he also established a precedent whereby some aspects of the poor's knowledge can be characterised as inherently flawed. Freire (1990:25) argued that the oppressed masses had "internalised" the consciousness of dominant groups and as such, their thought processes had "a quasi-adherence to objective reality, or quasi-immersion in reality. The dominated consciousness does not have sufficient distance from reality to objectify it in order to know it in a critical way" (Freire, 1998:506). The epistemological tradition of participation therefore oscillates between apotheosising local views and representing them as inchoate or as duplicitous.

The acceptance of data as credible cannot be predicated on its idiosyncrasy and its fulfilment of the researcher's insatiable quest for the unique; nor should the lack of distinctiveness be necessarily attributed to effects of unequal power between participants and researchers. The predilection has been to explain away local conformity to dominant views as products of power relationships. Participation should overcome such challenges if practiced with the drive to ensure inclusivity and appreciate difference. Yet, it may be argued that though rarely acknowledged, the participatory epistemology and methodology, unleashes its own struggle over knowledge and power within research contexts. Indeed, the very presence of a 'facilitator' who attempts to 'enable' or 'empower' communities to 'access', 'share' and 'build on' their knowledge, is a tacit admission that what was known (and/or was being practiced) locally was so disorganised as to be

ineffective or at best, incomplete. Mouffe (2005:100) quite poignantly shows that because “relations of power are constitutive of the social”, then the main question “is not how to eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values”.

The discussion above has isolated one youth focus group session (YFG1) from its position within a composite of research results and furthermore, the problems that arose could well have been due to my own faults in design and implementation. As a result, the foregoing is not in itself a comprehensive critique of the strain of participatory practice at issue, but may be seen as the initiation of a process of critically reflecting on meaning construction as derived from local consensual dialogue. Before entering the field I was aware that a number of difficult challenges would be faced. Yet, that one of the most significant obstacles would be a rupture within my own worldview was beyond contemplation. The field encounter described in the preceding paragraphs damaged my faith in the unassailability of the participatory methodology. Specifically, it became possible to see that there were problems in valuing the views of the poor which did not meet certain expectations. Below I explore another session which intensified my perplexities and contributed to the realisation that my entire approach needed to be revised.

### **5.2.3 YFG2: The Shattering of Consensus**

Consistent with the activities and discussions in the previous focus group session, the responses to the first task in YFG2 presented poverty as a condition plaguing those without access to certain basic material goods. Of 12 participants, eight associated their poverty with the lack of or limited access to food, money, water, light, clothes and good housing (see Table 5:3). As the agenda shifted from personal experiences with poverty, the relative consensus that had been steadily

emerging over the two days was irrevocably disrupted by an intense debate on the composition of the community.

**Table 5:3 Self-Perception of the Windsor Youths in YFG2 in Relation to Poverty**

	Are You Poor?			
	Yes			No
No. of responses	8	2	2	0
Reasons	Lack of material resources/needs (e.g. food/ money/ water)	Perception of life experiences (e.g. life is rough/things are hard)	Don't know why	

(Source: YFG2 Worksheet)

The second task was aimed at identifying various socio-economic categories in Windsor. Nevertheless, on the introduction of the idea that Windsor had various types of individuals (some poor and others non-poor), one youth stated quite vehemently: “no matter what you have or don’t have, anybody that live in Windsor must poor!” (Buju, YFG2 Notes) This argument was supported by many of the participants and fiercely disputed by others. Opposition to recognising any category of non-poor as part of the community was a challenge to the assumption around which the activity had been designed; but since the varying camps were confident of their positions, the decision was taken to facilitate a group discussion rather than complete the pre-designed research activities.

The debate that ensued was focused on the merits of three distinct propositions on the social anatomy of Windsor. Firstly, it was argued that there were many residents who could afford “anything they want, because they have good jobs” and others who “can’t even find food” and as such it was a community of both poor and non-poor (Singer, YFG2 Notes). Secondly, while the majority of the community could be considered poor, there were persons who were non-poor, not necessarily based on their financial situation, but because they worked hard, were ambitious and believed in their ability to do well for themselves and family members. These participants made

direct appeals to being non-poor on the basis of their values and work-ethic. The third proposition (and perhaps the most controversial from an academic point of view) was that, based on conditions congenital to the community, living in Windsor *ipso facto*, precludes the possibility of being non-poor. It was argued that, "Windsor is hard life. We don't have road, we don't have water, most people round here teefin' light. Everybody hate Windsor people. You think anybody want to live up here, much less rich people?" (Buju, YFG2 Notes).

The group debate had unwittingly introduced three different versions of poverty: poverty as materially determined; poverty as multi-dimensional, but particularly related to state of mind and/or attitude; and finally, poverty as a socio-structural phenomenon marked by hardship and ineluctably inscribed in space/place. Whereas the first focus group session had been disappointing as a result of its incompatibility with the epistemological assumptions, the second had conformed almost perfectly to some of the tenets and expectations of the participatory approach: (a) the participants took control of the session; (b) their debates were intense and sometimes needed mediation as the most eloquent speakers attempted to dominate the discussion; and (c) perhaps most importantly, some of the opinions expressed were major deviations from orthodox views of poverty. However, YFG2 had missed the mark in some of the key areas of my participatory expectations. For example, no consensus had been reached and although there were at varying stages acknowledgements of some merit in each of the sides taken, very few participants were willing to abandon their position in favour of a rivalling assertion. Furthermore, the debate had exhausted the time allotted for completing the taxonomic and ranking exercises (and the associated discussions) that would have elicited community specific concepts and understandings. Knowledge on poverty was being sought at source, but it should have ideally been captured in the format (as in YFG1) of my planned programme as this would have enabled easy academic translation. Thus, despite the diversity of the propositions and the

fecundity of the intricate ideas that had been invoked, this focus group session was initially considered a second failure.

#### **5.2.4 The Fantasy of Consensus and the Claiming of Spaces**

The research being undertaken was geared towards finding and critically interrogating an idea of poverty that was indigenous (though comprised of multiple strains of thought). The presumption was that mainstream conceptualisations would be commixed with folk perceptions, and as such it would be necessary to subject any 'local knowledge' found to a laborious process of disentanglement. In YFG1 the participants were unanimous in their support of a materialist perspective and this frustrated the effort to identify and explore novel concepts. On the other hand, the participants in YFG2 had demonstrated enough diversity through their debate to suggest that the predetermined activities and the dialogue around those tasks would have produced more nuanced results. However, this would have required a reversion to the research agenda that had been predesigned and a truncation of an interesting and enthusiastic discussion – an option that I considered and dismissed. The session could therefore be seen as an aborted opportunity to begin the process of cultivating a local perspective on poverty.

The reflections on the proceedings of YFG2 raised a number of questions, including: should the completion of the planned exercises have taken precedence over a spontaneous debate so as to facilitate the research objectives? And, in the end, what would be achieved by developing an alternative concept of poverty which would be said to represent a consensual 'community perspective'? These questions are, in effect, contemplations of the 'possibilities' of participation. They correspond to the enigmas evoked in Rahnema's excoriation of the emancipatory claims of Participatory Action Research (PAR), where he inquires: (a) whether the "change

agents"/facilitators are really embarked on a learning journey or are they more interested in the "most appropriate ways to convince the uneducated of the merits of their own educated convictions"; (b) the extent to which "dialogue *per se* could enable the so-called voiceless to question the ideological premises and the hidden currents that define the dialogue"; and (c) if ultimately, the processes of participation are not likely to indirectly refine and reinforce the major design of conventional developers (Rahnema, 1990:205 & 208). Bearing these queries in mind, when reviewing the move towards consensus, may aid in revealing some of the contradictions in the endeavour to use the meanings constructed from the participatory approach as directly reflecting participants' views.

The allegation that participatory approaches rely upon a 'myth of community' from which consensus perspectives are produced (Cleaver, 2001), has unrelentingly intumesced as the practice of this methodology has moved from marginality to the mainstream and as the "term once associated with a process through which people discovered their own potentialities has become an instrument for managed intervention" (Cornwall, 2002:3). The intention behind these methods and the expectation held by many researchers (such as myself) is that they will emerge from a brief period in the field with completed agendas and a synthetic mass of data capable of being represented as a corpus of the 'community's perspective'/'the poor's perspective'. There resides in such claims an element of misrepresentation. Some critics of the participatory approach have demonstrated instances where the 'legitimising intent' of research was extant (Mosse, 2001; Woodhouse, 2004) and where some facilitators have surreptitiously engineered outcomes through research designs that serve only to confirm the official discourse or pre-existing policy priorities. It is this type of co-option that Rahnema draws on in generally dismissing the "commitment to learning" from the marginalised which is a pillar of participatory thought. It should be noted that all research approaches and techniques are open to this kind of

malfeasance. Indeed, any researcher using any technique can manipulate data and as such, the emphasis, should not be placed on how the method can be (and is often) abused through examples of “bad practice” (Cornwall & Pratt, 2003). Rather, the main issue of concern should be the fact that the methodology itself may be an instrument of self-delusion for practitioners, participants and audience of the disseminated work, through what Kapoor refers to as “*the fantasy of consensus*” (2005:1209).

Mosse has proposed that the focus group as a method in the participatory tool-kit usually involves, “group activities leading to plenary presentations” and in so doing the framework “assumes and encourages the expression of consensus” (1994:508). The predatory quest for consensus is incentivised by the fact that consensuses which emanate from interactive group processes make “the structural properties of social life *accountable, reportable and observable*” (Murphy, 1990:24, emphasis added). Consensus confers validity. Therefore, even where there is no attempt at surreptitiously engineering a particular set of outcomes, the design of research tools tends to inflect group discussions toward consensual discourse. The implications of such distortions are rarely (if ever) recognised and contradicting views (which may be orthodox or unorthodox depending on the researcher’s aims) are mostly mentioned, often explored but usually entirely explained away. In consequence, reports generated from participatory assessments usually present their findings as resulting from a unitary community/group position. This is seen through statements such as: “the poorest identified their problems as...” or “the major constraints identified by the most disadvantaged groups are...” (see, Moore *et al*, 1998 and Brock, 1999, for a review of a number Participatory Poverty Appraisals (PPA)). However, difference and dissent are frequently dominant features of group discourse and yet their removal is integral to the validity and authority of a finalised text. Paradoxically, as mentioned before, there is often a keen interest in finding dissonance and resisting views but then they must be

incorporated into a whole to draw a representative conclusion on what the group ("the poor"/ "the poorest") voices expressed.

According to Kapoor (2002:109), it is unclear and unresolved how much of this "reconciling of differences" amounts to an "erasure/suppression of difference and how much is the result of acceptable give and take". My own research, for the period that I remained on an odyssey for 'a local definition', was firmly anchored in this "fantasy of consensus". The question then becomes, should not those research tools which artificially generate consensus be considered facilitators of – to borrow a phrase from Murphy (1990:25) – "a skilfully managed illusion"? Inasmuch as a community action plan to inform the policy intervention in an area cannot be produced without an 'agreement' on priorities, the meaning construction that was being attempted in my two focus group sessions, was contingent on the elicitation of congruity. There was inherent in the methods a drive towards commonality in ways of understanding (e.g. by collapsing categories) and representing poverty (e.g. visual wealth raking exercises). However, the *consensus bias* necessarily actively silences some 'voices' while legitimising others and in this way it constitutes a retrenchment of the democratic principles upon which participation is predicated. In the quest for 'usable' data, the pretermission of the untidy, the incomplete and the ambiguous in favour of a manufactured consistency and closure may therefore be misguided.

Despite being drained of flexibility in dominant modes of practice, democratic potential remains alive in participation. The distinction between "invited" and "claimed" spaces (Cornwall, 2002; Mohan, 2007), offers the possibility to explore the avenues through which the poor can be substantively engaged (or excluded) in processes of dialogical knowledge construction. Mohan (2007:789) describes *invited spaces* as the more formal events where forums are created for



stakeholders to contribute and ideally reach a consensus. *Claimed spaces*, in contrast, are “more organic and involve the poor taking control of the process” without necessarily being invited to do so. In YFG2, a cohort of marginalised youths were selected and ‘invited to participate’ in a largely researcher controlled environment. Nevertheless, the process was subverted by a number of the participants who ‘claimed the space’ and imposed complexity and obscurity (*i.e.* everybody in Windsor is poor) where there was the presumption of certainty (*i.e.* the community is diverse). By rejecting the assumption that their community is comprised of both poor and non-poor, they arrested the development of knowledge that would have been built upon it and that might have been represented as a product of local/community consensus. This example directly responds in the affirmative to Rahnema’s question of whether it is possible for the poor to challenge and invite reassessments of previously held views.

The foregoing is not an unqualified *profession de foi* in the sanctity of claimed spaces. All participatory events are convened by invitation, where the researcher/facilitator selects a venue, dictates who is to be included and excluded, prescribes an agenda and regulates the discussion. As such, it is largely based on the convictions and objectives of the researcher whether the interactive space in a forum will be ‘open’, therefore allowing the participants to usurp the designs or ‘closed’, meaning the exchanges will be strategically and purposively managed. Furthermore, it is particularly important to recognise that, even where spaces are open, there is no guarantee that the participants: (a) *will know* the information being sought; (b) *will express* their views in an environment that may (or may not) be restrictive for some; or (c) *will share* their insights and want to contribute their knowledge to the research. Democracy is inherently uncertain. Participatory practice tends to envision communities as reservoirs of ‘folk wisdom’ (that when accessed can easily provide knowledge) and represent ‘locals’ as rational and productive individuals who will recognise the need to participate as it is in their benefit (Cleaver, 2001). This callow interpretation

of community, according to Mosse (1994:521), has meant that there has been a lack of assessment "of the *limits* of local knowledge and awareness".

If it is accepted that participation within the claimed space is intrinsically equivocal and frequently incomplete and messy, then the possibility of co-producing meaning within an 'open' dialogical forum, is almost completely random. As such, numerous practitioners point to the use of flexibility and improvisation as an imminent threat to the continued use of participation as a knowledge building device (Cornwall & Pratt, 2003:40). These views are incontrovertible, to the extent that 'knowledge building' is equated exclusively with those practices which tend toward *the hardness of facts* (Hastrup, 1993) through the collection of data that is 'fixed', 'consistent' and 'replicable'. Facilitators in open forums are often unable to cross-check information; frequently, the nature of their discussions precludes the use of 'triangulation'; and it is unlikely they will be able to produce 'community action plans' or summary documents and formalise agreement. Extrapolating these considerations to the issues raised from my research, YFG2 cannot be seen as a contribution to any single idea congenital to the Windsor youths. Instead, the group deliberations generated a conflictual interchange closer to what Mouffe (1999) refers to as "agonistic pluralism" where there was an agreement to disagree about the nature of poverty. In the words of one participant: "you hold what you hold, and me hold what me hold" (Baller, YFG2 Notes).

In light of the events in YFG2, the choice (considering the need to complete my research project) was either to identify and employ other methods so as to continue in pursuit of an indigenous definition, or begin to introspectively assess the value and viability of the search for a definitional instrument with claims to authenticity as a result of its organic emergence from local consensus. I chose the latter and this led to the conclusion that divergent views on poverty could not be

collapsed into one holistic construct that represented 'a view from the Windsor community'. The contrasting results in the first and second focus groups ensured firstly, that the polyvocality of poverty was recognised. Additionally, the sessions encouraged a more circumspect approach which placed due emphasis on: (a) researched-researcher social relations in the construction of poverty knowledge; and on (b) discourses and shifting subject positions in perspectives of poverty.

### **5.3. What is Poverty to You? Individual Narratives of Situated and Structured Poverty Identities**

The two youth focus group sessions were part of a research strategy designed to expose the inability of dominant conceptualisations to meaningfully represent poverty as lived by some of those defined as poor. This would be done through the participatory development of an 'organic' notion of poverty rooted in: (a) local knowledge and (b) daily experiences of deprivation. In totality, the project was envisaged as at once an experiential abjuration of orthodox ideas and an empowering engagement for the dormant agencies of the participants. It is important to note however, that the local product being sought would be a direct legatee of an ideology which constructs 'community' as a bounded entity comprised of interconnected crucibles with a shared and autochthonous conception of reality. On interrogation, this conception of community was revealed as both paralogistic and quixotic. This section takes as its point of departure, the preceding critiques of the role of participation in meaning-making exercises and postulates that the subjective nature of poverty militates against the erection of any consensual edifice. It then goes on to explore the proposed subjectivity by interrogating individual accounts so as to identify

and examine the various interpretive and interpersonal strands which inform individual perspectives on poverty (which are sometimes also exhibited in group forums).

In the first place, following Pigg (1996:165), it is being postulated here that a "locality" (or a local perspective) is "constituted through relations with wider systems" and is therefore, itself simultaneously a "translocal" and a "transnational" space. The analysis of YFG1 for example, highlighted my disappointment at finding that the views of the youths were coextensive with the official and scholarly representations that characterise poverty as a lack of financial resources. The congruity between dominant and local understandings of poverty proved to be irreconcilable with the participatory epistemology that fetishises 'community' and valorises the idiosyncrasies induced through varying techniques. Perhaps most perplexing at the time was the fact that the positions taken in the session were not simply being expressed *in vacuo*; the participants throughout the discussion had evidentially tied their conceptions into lived and observed experiences of material deprivation. It is by giving due value to this connection and thinking in terms of the community's poverty repertoires, that the appropriate response to the data began to be formed. On reflection, it became clear that through their tangled and tenebrous interactions with various social and economic institutions (state and non-state), the residents of Windsor are continually structured as agents in need of, among numerous other things, jobs, water and electricity. That this small group of youths would conceive of and represent poverty as a materially determined condition should not have been surprising when it is obvious that the relational infrastructure of which they are a part, organises their rights and entitlements around a very narrow set of possibilities for action and change. Thus, the initial scepticism and stultification of the data on the basis of its supposed conventionality was unwarranted. In fact, the more tenuous aspects of this type of research exercise and as a result, the issues needing investigation and revision were: (a) the processes through which the information was generated

and (b) the naïve assumptions about what the collected data *should* (or in this case, *should not*) look like.

Secondly, the evidence from YFG2 demonstrates the contingent and specious nature of any enterprise aimed at eliciting and appropriating through consensus, an artefact that can be formally presented as local knowledge, *from the poor by the poor*. Rather than a finite and isotropic conclusion, the exchanges between these youths, revealed disparate ideas of poverty which were discursively constructed and resolutely defended. Not only was poverty shown to be polysemous (at least three distinct meanings were deployed); the varying perspectives also resonated with various community and society-wide discourses and experiences of deprivation. Under these circumstances, a drive towards a consensus would silence and censure one or another of the distinct coteries of explanation. However, any of the positions taken could have been considered as no less (if not more) valid than the single overarching narrative being sought. Furthermore, to manufacture unanimity from untidy and disparate perspectives would eviscerate the situated and subjective from what was meant to be a participatory definition of poverty (*i.e.* one created through insights from people's own experiences). As a result of these considerations, it was seen as imperative to begin to explore the discursive formation of the ideas being expressed, rather than continuing in forlorn pursuit of *the* local perspective which 'truly' represented the views of the community.

It should be at this point reiterated that this is not a critique launched at the principles of participation in its entirety, which value *inter alia*, inclusivity, dialogue and empowerment of the poor. Ford-Smith's (1995) depiction of the development of the Sistren Theatre Collective is an excellent illustration of the potential of participation to value dialogue and difference and still allow

disenfranchised individuals and groups to discover their power to act upon oppressive societal structures. In other successful cases, highlighted by Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1668) the poor have taken techniques learned through participation, such as mapping, and used it in a process of self-discovery and/or to demand action from authorities. However, even in the illustrations alluded to by Cornwall and Jewkes, the knowledge was not autochthonous, but was a *co-production*: the participatory technique did not simply reflect local insights; it sublimated the knowledge in such a way that it became useful to both academics (in research) and the community (in claim-making to official bodies).

Participation is an extremely potent tool in research and action; however, there are stringent representational responsibilities attached to that power which demands critical reflexivity at every stage. The very elicitation of knowledge is the conception of processes of structuring it. If the result from participatory exercises is not *pure* local knowledge then how should it be considered? It may be argued that if I had completed my initial objectives, I would simply have emerged with another manner of defining the poor. Furthermore, if this was to be expressed as the *poor's definition*, then that artefact would be guilty of many of the same dissimulations being levelled at the prevailing approach to poverty. No indigenous definition could be found, only co-constructed. This realisation when combined with other discoveries opened up a host of other lines of investigation. In the end, my decision was: if I could not get where I wanted to go using participation in the way I had originally designed, I would retain some of its core principles as central to my practice, but change direction.

The priorities of the research were therefore being radically transformed and a new path was being charted. It is ostensible from the preceding sections that there were numerous versions of

poverty lying dormant, running alongside and/or competing with each other in any given context. This means that the relational and structural consonance which may exist within a locality does not inevitably create a cathexis for a shared conception of reality. A community is a labyrinth fraught with unseen and untold ambiguities. With this in mind, a mode of investigation was devised that took the insights from the focus group sessions and applied them to a reading/re-reading of collected data.<sup>45</sup> It involved: (a) a careful unpacking of the intricate and disparate forces interacting to inform poverty perceptions; and (b) an interrogation of the obfuscated discourses present within palimpsestic narratives of deprivation. Drawing primarily from in-depth interviews, individual narratives are used below to demonstrate how the interpretation of poverty is relevant to and rooted within the respondent's experiential anamnesis. In the cases below, individuals while discussing *their* poverty or poverty in general revealed a perceptual mélange composed of a number of discourses (such as popular, religious or official ideologies) that are often interwoven into formal and informal characterisations of impoverishment. An attempt is made to uncover the interactions between these currents and the subjectivities that inform identities and perceptions. This relies on a Bourdieuan understanding of the social which seeks to call into question the complete network of relations (or as much of it as possible) underlying worldviews and 'facts' (Wacquant, 2001). Social phenomena such as poverty are therefore to be appreciated, not only by examining the conception that those who experience it "form of it for themselves", but by investigating the profound causes and interactions that escape from consciousness (Wacquant, 2001:106).

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<sup>45</sup> Many of my formal interviews had been conducted prior to the youth focus group sessions. This data was re-examined in the context of these eruditions.

### **5.3.1 Auntie Nez: Poverty as a “Whole Heap of Stress”**

#### ***(Interview Transcript #7)***

Auntie Nez is a 30 year old, mother of four. She is originally from Windsor, but moved away in 1998 and returned only about five months ago.<sup>46</sup> The reason for her return is that along with her partner, she is attempting to build a house for the family and there was an urgent need to reduce rental costs. The house they are building is taking longer and is much more expensive than had been anticipated and as such Auntie Nez who would prefer to stay home (as her youngest is still an infant), has been forced to find a job to support the effort. She is therefore reluctantly working for the minimum wage at a gas station for 16 hours a day (6am to 10pm) three to four times a week. Auntie Nez expresses both worry and frustration at having to return to Windsor, particularly since moving back has meant that her two older children have not been able to attend school regularly due to the increased travelling distance and costs. Her discomfort is further compounded by her openly expressed dislike of other Windsor residents and the hardships that come with the community (such as lack of running water). Her view of poverty is conspicuously influenced by her personal challenges:

**Interviewer:** What is poverty?

**Auntie Nez:** Poorness [Laugh]

**Interviewer:** [Laugh] What does that mean?

**Auntie Nez:** Like, no water, money, food and dealing with a whole heap of stress

**Interviewer:** So are you poor?

**Auntie Nez:** Yes, I'm poor

**Interviewer:** Why do you say that?

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<sup>46</sup> As of April, 2008



**Auntie Nez:** 'Cause I don't have a house for myself. I don't need a whole heap of money. I just need money I can finance myself with. I just need money I can be comfortable with.

Poverty in this case is not represented as merely a lack of resources, Auntie Nez views the "whole heap of stress" associated with deprivation as an important independent factor. Her partner has a stable job above minimum wage and she has a fortnightly income and so life circumstances have not altogether deprived this family of the ability to satisfy their basic needs. Nevertheless, in an attempt to improve their quality of life (by building a house), they have been caught within potentially chronic processes of deprivation which weigh heavily upon and disrupt Auntie Nez's peace of mind. Her answer to whether or not her job helps to "make ends meet", is instructive:

**Interviewer:** You work from 6 in the morning to 10 at night. That is well long. But, that help you to make ends meet?

**Auntie Nez:** Eh-eh [no]. My demand is so big, 'cause let me tell you, if you want to live poor, certain things you not going to find hard. But to the type of life maybe that you want to live, you will find it hard. Because what you want get done, can't get done.

The cascades of stress and frustration that flow from varied experiences of deprivation throughout her life are as much a definition of her poverty as any material lack. Her chagrin is intensified by the physical demands of living in Windsor. However, the main irritant at this juncture is the inability to see progress despite all the effort and sacrifice: "from I am small, I am carrying water on my head and now I come back same way, no difference". In the formulation presented here, poverty is constant struggle and pain caused by interminable lack. The stress of poverty exponentially distends when the victim has a desire to be upwardly mobile. In her narrative, Auntie Nez has constructed herself as different from many other Windsor residents who she believes do not find the immutable deprivations burdensome, but have learned to live imperturbably with lack.

As a woman, matriarch and *de facto* main carer she expresses concern for the wellbeing of her children in the current difficult situation. She was for example, quite emotional while explaining that her daughter's school report had warned that there were too many absences. Yet, the need to "have a house for myself" was the main source of worry. This priority, amidst all the other complex entanglements of her views and aspirations, clearly illustrates the strategic importance of home ownership. To many individuals and families within low-income communities, owning a home fulfils dual roles as both symbol and security. In this case, the house being built is the physical manifestation of an exercise in self-improvement and upon its completion it is expected to provide independence (from rent and landlords) as well as a legacy for the children. Auntie Nez's definition and narrative of poverty, therefore reveals aspects of her identity as negotiated within her distinct social locations. That is, the perspective expressed in this interview incorporates the various discourses around her role as: (a) struggling mother/carers and (b) her self-prescribed position amongst an idyllic deserving/aspirational poor.

### **5.3.2    *Prento: Poverty as "No Opportunity"***

***(Interview Transcript #21)***

Prento is an 18 year old, assistant salesperson for a St. Ann's Bay based company. He moved to Windsor from the community of Lime Hall around the age of 12 and started working three years later during his fourth year of secondary school (Grade 10). This, he explained, was because he wanted to help his mother: "things was very hard...you go to school but you have to borrow it most times". The job was secured by his cousin, Mark, who lived in his old community of Lime Hall and is a salesperson at the company. Mark saw Prento idling on the road and "sorted out" an opportunity for him to become an assistant. Prento has said regardless of his performance, there

is absolutely no possibility of progression in this job since a person "from Windsor" will never be allowed to hold the position of a salesperson within the organisation. Despite his stable employment that pays above the minimum wage and that earns him respect in the community, Preto described himself as "very poor" citing that he had many responsibilities to his mother and sister and many things he would like to do that are impossible. His view was explored:

**Interviewer:** Why would you say you are poor?

**Preto:** 'Cause no opportunity not there to get rich. So you always going to stay poor!

**Interviewer:** In terms of what, what you mean?

**Preto:** You don't have any facility to go out there and achieve what you want to achieve

**Interviewer:** So what would you want to achieve?

**Preto:** For myself? I would want to run my own business.

Two aspects of his life are of issue here. First, having completed high school and being in a secure job at 18 means that he is more fortunate in both respects than the vast majority of the youths (and indeed many of the adults) in Windsor. Nevertheless, Preto on this occasion had decided to make comparisons in relation to those he works with, rather than his neighbours. He sees himself as deprived of the opportunities open to others who reside in more reputable areas of St. Ann. Secondly, Preto spent the first 12 years of his life in Lime Hall and moved to Windsor six years ago and yet his self-perceptions are mediated through a beleaguered Windsor identity. It is an identity he resolutely defends and seems to be proud of, even though he believes it negatively impacts upon his life chances. These two factors inform this entrenched view that the focal point of poverty is a closed opportunity structure which limits the social mobility of the residents of the community. This position is exemplified in the comment: "they tell you the furthest you can go from here is across the road, you can't go nowhere else. Because is Windsor you come from, you not going to achieve nothing".

The definition of poverty as the inability to “achieve what you want to achieve” or to improve life circumstances to match ambition and potential is strikingly similar to Amartya Sen’s Capabilities approach where wellbeing is assessed by “the freedom of individuals to live lives that are valued (termed the capability of the individual), *i.e.* the realisation of human potential” (Laderchi *et al*, 2003:253). Within this framework, poverty is not merely a lack of assets but a restriction of freedom that can only be overcome through the non-discriminatory fulfilment of entitlements to the necessities for human survival and development. Interestingly, these are the very points being made by Preto, but it is unlikely that he has been formally introduced to these concepts. Instead, the view of poverty he expresses in the interview seems to have been influenced by personal experiences and observations made within and outside the boundaries of his locality. In particular, he justifies his position by pointing to the infrastructural deficits of Windsor, his unequal position in the labour market and numerous examples of neglect and abuse by agents of the state (such as the police).

Therefore, Preto’s perspective on poverty may be seen as fuelled by the belief that there are significant restrictions imposed on life chances by a society that deliberately closes its doors to the residents of Windsor. This entraps them within a level of existence which would not be acceptable for other areas within St. Ann. The account expressed here is a part of well established discourses on exclusion and victimisation which can be heard from various people in the community. The state and its agents are the chief antagonists. And as such he concludes that people from Windsor can never get ahead in life: “we always going to struggle”.

### 5.3.3 *Larry: Poverty as "Sufferation"*

#### (Interview Transcript #18)

Larry is an unemployed, 19 year old who has no fixed abode: "I live by myself and with a lot of friends". This young man spent many of his formative years with his father in a middle income area in the capital city, Kingston. However, he ran away after an altercation with his father and was then sent to live with his mother and four of his siblings in "a one-room in Windsor". After leaving Kingston, Larry did not return to school so he is only educated to Grade 6 at the primary level and as such is barely literate. He sees this near illiteracy as the major barrier to getting a stable job and he has almost entirely given up on being formally employed. Larry "hustles" for his existence by stitching together a number of income earning measures: "anything that comes, you have to do it. If you get a construction work, you have to do it, if you get to sell in the market you have to do it, if you get to sell a little weed, do painting, anything". In discussing his own poverty, he expresses an interesting view:

**Interviewer:** So would you say you are poor?

**Larry:** Yeah!

**Interviewer:** Why would you say you are in poverty right now?

**Larry:** Yes, 'cause I don't have no job that I can go and come in at evening time, that I can 'throw a little partner',<sup>47</sup> can build a little house for myself and stuff like that. I'm not working, nothing like that, so I am in poverty, so that mean I just have to face a little, or go through a little tribulation.

Thus, for Larry, his poverty is essentially comprised of two elements. The first relates to his inability to secure an income so as to make material acquisitions and participate in social activities such as "throwing partner" or "building a house". These are highly valued cultural

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<sup>47</sup> 'Partner' is the Jamaican term for a rotating savings scheme in which a collective of individuals contribute a fixed sum of money, at fixed intervals (e.g. weekly, monthly) to a 'banker'. The banker pays out to one member of the scheme the entire collected sum at set points and decides the order of payments among the collective.

artefacts within the community. The second pertains to bearing the unyielding trials and “tribulations” that accompany need and this particular strain was returned to and developed on throughout the interview. For instance, when asked about his childhood experiences, he responded:

As I tell you, I grow up in a one room and some of the time you have to wear your brother shoes and your brother pants and you have to curse over it. So I really grow under certain experience. I know what life is all about, what sufferation is all about. So even if I get the opportunity and get rich in life, I can still know that, yes, I go through sufferation.

Larry describes his continued endurance of extreme need and his past experiences of the humiliations associated with deprivation as *going through sufferation*. The cultural framework within which *poverty as sufferation* sits, constructs the experience as a life lesson imparting sagacity on those who have triumphed over or liberated themselves from the stranglehold of this sanguinary condition. The sufferation conceptualisation, originally Rastafarian, is now diffused throughout the society’s consciousness and used to represent many contemporary instances of socio-economic deprivation as atavistic. Indeed, the current struggles of the ‘black masses’ are seen to resonate with the dispossession and impoverishment that characterised the entropic plantation and colonial system of previous centuries. Although mainly explored through reggae music, dub poetry and other art forms, academia also reflects some of these currents. For example, Obika Gray (2004:15), describes the urban poor in Jamaica as the “historically marginal” and “downtrodden” section of the population; Christine Barrow (1986:169) refers to the “cultural complex of the Black and the poor in the Caribbean”, and Patricia Anderson (2001:54) argues that income inequalities in Jamaica run along historical class lines and “still reproduce racial cleavages”.

Though undoubtedly among the most materially deprived individuals interviewed in the research project, there was an unyielding optimism in Larry's account. Poverty was represented as an ethereal challenge that had to be overcome to make one stronger and understand "what life is all about". He views learning to fully read and write as the only way forward, as seen in statements such as: "right now the system is all about having an education" and "from you have the education you know, it easier to get a job". Though he is involved in almost no formal social interactions (education, work, residence, *etc.*) the account expressed here by Larry is structured not within an antagonism toward the state or society in general; rather it is situated within a complex of broken relationships, missed opportunities and mistakes that lead to internecine struggles and hardship.

#### **5.3.4 Gangalee: Poverty as "Poor Livy" (Interview Transcript #6)**

Gangalee is a Rastafarian farmer and musician who is originally from Kingston, but has lived in the Windsor community since around 2005. Brought up in a number of infamous ghettos with his mother, father and ten brothers and sisters, he describes his early experiences as "very rough" because "I go through a lot of suppression". Gangalee recalls that his parents attempted to ensure all their children had an education, but "instead of us going to school to learn, we take to smoking, or we take to idling, you know – play some gun war, catch butterfly or those things". He indicates that as a result of a mixture of hardship and delinquency, "out of my family, only two of us, out of 11 children for my mother and father can handle pen and paper". Having left secondary school in the third year (Grade 9) able to read, "but not 100 percent", Gangalee remained unemployed for an extended period until he started doing ad-hoc construction jobs which eventually led him to work in St. Ann, and settle in Windsor. Now he works as a gardener so as to

supplement the income from his true vocations in music and farming. Through his music he has been able to join established artists on their tours of England, France, Germany, Switzerland and Spain. He notes that it was “not really travel and make big money, but I know that I want to spread the message to the people” and to experience different things. Gangalee’s exposure to a variety of world views has cemented his religious convictions and therefore his understanding of the world cannot be divorced from his Rastafarian *livity*. This *livity* is a belief that living well is a function of being in relationships of harmony with one’s self, the Creator and the environment. It provides for a very compelling view on poverty:

**Interviewer:** What is poverty?

**Gangalee:** Poverty is like a man who really can’t find a night dinner, or who can’t build a nice house. Poverty is a kind of lack of education and all those things. People who can’t communicate together because their mind is narrow, they don’t have a new mind. They don’t look to the future they dig down into the past. Those things create terrible poverty upon the people. So we will have it till people can get together and overstand<sup>48</sup> the mystic of creation and know that we have to stop living in the past, because we will get *pasturistic* and think about the future and get *futuristic*.

**Interviewer:** So you think that we have different types of poor people?

**Gangalee:** Well it all depends. Because some say you have the lower class, the lower-middle class, the upper class, the upper-middle class [Laugh], like it’s a step grade, you know? Because a man might live in a two storey house or him might have a three bedroom concrete house and a next man might live in a little board box – yes? Probably he see himself up on that other man, but life is just one balance. We can’t let material things let us think we are above people. We have to just see ourselves as one equal brother and sister, you know?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes.

**Gangalee:** Yeah man, only those things can break down poverty.

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Overstanding’ is more than an agglutination. It refers to a special epistemological relationship between man and concept. By standing ‘under’ a concept, as in ‘understanding’ the conceiver is subjected to its will and to what it wishes to pass down. Contrastingly, by standing ‘over’ it the relationship is reversed and the conceiver is now higher than the concept, in control and able to see from above – the full picture.



For Gangalee then, the problem of poverty is a problem of the mind. He proposes that: “you have to elevate your mind out of poverty, to elevate yourself out of poverty”; meaning that material conditions are largely the result of a way of thinking. However, the relationship also works in the inverse and daily deprivations can themselves unsettle the mind. This is clearly illustrated in his comments on community poverty:

**Interviewer:** What would you say about this community then, in terms of poverty?

**Gangalee:** Well so far the community is nice, but the facilities. Good housing, good road, nice light and those things need to set up for the people so they could be more comfortable and live in more harmony. 'Cause when a one lives rugged he is uncomfortable, his mind not steady. So many time they will trigger off and anything will happen. That's why you see many time in the ghetto, many wicked! things happen. Because the people mind uncomfortable, and them body is uncomfortable.

The proposition here is that, if the mind can be freed from “Babylonian”<sup>49</sup> distractions and “politricks”, then the possibilities are endless for strategising to be content with life. Therefore, while Gangalee views the lack of resources as a significant problem, it is only important insofar as it sits within a context where individuals are able to be “comfortable” and to “live in more harmony” with their neighbours. Indeed, it is only through having “unity amongst ourself” that the problems of poverty can be successfully overcome. He portends that “if we don't get ourself in that uniform order, in that unified order, it is going to be just more poverty”. The argument being made is that, in one sense, it is not the experience of economic deprivation that constitutes poverty; instead it is the failure or inability to escape Babylon system's mental enslavement and conceive of viable and productive existence outside of the miasmic consumerism of modern society.

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<sup>49</sup> Babylon is the term used to describe the exploitative Western political and economic system that has been inherited from slavery and colonial times. It is believed that the routines have changed but much of the philosophy and practice has remained in current social organisation.

Even though the emphasis is on the mind, it is also evident that the consanguinity of the cognitive and the relational is central to Gangalee's perspective. For example, when asked "so growing up, was life hard?" As part of his reply, he noted: "life is easy, but the livity was rough". Here, life is bifurcated and the term livity is introduced so as to distinguish between living or existing *per se* and the social interactions connate to that existence. In this way, "life is easy" reflects the fact that he had no physical handicaps or problems with his health and to that extent the biological processes of growing up were smooth. On the other hand, the "livity was rough" denotes the inability to establish commensal relationships between himself and his Creator, as well as with his natural environment and others within his community. This product of Rastafarian critical lexicography is more than a neologistic exercise aimed at correcting a semantic anomaly. It is integral to the Rasta world view and is the parallax through which poverty is assessed. Consequently, in discussing whether or not he is poor – drawing on his identity complex as a Rastafarian, a musician and a farmer, Gangalee explains his own livity:

**Interviewer:** So how do you see your self then, poor or not poor?

**Gangalee:** No, no, no I don't poor, I very rich. Not with money, or with house, or with car, but with the love of the Almighty and the love of the people. And the love for Mother Nature, which is the earth. Yeah, so I well rich. And if you check it, in a form everyone rich, but some don't really see that riches.

This version of poverty emerges from a complete reframing of the daily struggles of the Afro-Jamaican poor which draws on pan-African visions, the experiences of grinding poverty for the black majority and African retentions in religion and culture. By combining these different strands of thought, Rastafarianism appeals to the sensibilities of the masses and is viewed as socio-politically empowering for many poor individuals in Jamaica (Buffonge, 2001). In addition, its ideological component serves as an enduring critique of and perpetual challenge to entrenched notions about the poor and established social and economic responses to deprivation. Ultimately,

this perspective also recursively acts upon the perceptions of its adherents, all the time indelibly inscribing on identity, its complex of values.

### 5.3.5 Memories, Methods and Meanings: Questioning Reality in Experiences and Perceptions of Poverty

Each of the individual narratives above reveals a perspective that has been mnemonically composed through the individual's multiple social transactions and as such each constitutes a rich source material from which individualised understandings of poverty can be interrogated (see Table 5:4 below). In speaking with Gangalee, for instance, I quickly realised that I was not only interacting with him, but with a number of sources which have aided in the formation of his identity. These include spiritual leaders, "brethrens" and "sistrens" within the Rastafarian faith, musical influences as well as the Bible.

**Table 5:4 Poverty Perspectives and Resonances**

Poverty Perspectives and Resonances					
Participants	Meaning of Poverty	Characteristics of the Poor	Main Discourse	Location within Larger Discourses	Level(s) of Operation*
<b>Auntie Nez</b>	No money, no food and a whole heap of stress	Proud; willing to work hard and make sacrifices; need help	Aspirational poor	Opposes current rigid monetary definitions. Would satisfy many within academic and official circles with its focus on 'deserving' help based on merit	Political and personal
<b>Prento</b>	Can't go out there and achieve what you want to achieve	Will work but no opportunities; constant struggle to eat and live;	Marginalised victims of the system	Part of popular discourses about oppressive economic and political system. Strong objection to official understandings of and responses to poverty	Political
<b>Larry</b>	Going through suffering and tribulation	Need help to overcome barriers; Strong and determined	Emancipatory struggle for survival	Takes on popular and mainstream elements of Rastafarianism. However, sheds anti-society elements often attached. Not adversarial to orthodox thinking.	Personal
<b>Gangalee</b>	When the mind is not comfortable, because it is trapped in Babylon System	Not able to understand what life should be; Uncomfortable physically and mentally; oppressed	Religious re-reading of the importance of both <i>life</i> and <i>livity</i>	Listened to and liked as expressed in popular art forms. Aspects are adopted but not widely acted upon. Rejects dominant strains of thought	Political and religious

(Source: Interview Transcript #6, #7, #18, #21)

According to Heylighen (1999), knowledge exists as "memories or ideas" which are "patterns of activation in the brain". However, "in order to test the adequacy of that knowledge it needs to be

exteriorised, 'brought out into the open', where it can be studied and analysed by a group of observers" (1999:25). In qualitative research, this exteriorisation is effected through the application of a given *method* which here is taken to be inclusive of space–time (*i.e.* complete context). Whereas the previous section elicited *memories* (as comprised of past experiences and present perceptions) so as to comprehend various identity-informed *meanings* of poverty, here the 'effects' of data collection techniques will be placed under scrutiny (*i.e.* the social relations of research practice). The starting point of this evaluation is the recognition that invariably, the method used in accessing an individual's account of poverty, impacts upon the *alethic aspect* and/or the *alethic value* of the recollections and interpretations. If this is accepted, then evidentiary fragments of lived experiences and perceptions cannot be analysed as independent from the processes through which they were generated. Additionally, there is an effort at thoroughly auditing participant positionality. This is not simply an examination of the impact of the researcher on narrative construction, but a consideration of how participants negotiate their identity within and with reference to the peculiarities of the interactive context. An attempt is made to judiciously consider the complexities of co-producing knowledge which employs devices drawn from the individual narratives above.

In order to assess how different dialogical processes diffract responses in one direction or another and whether truth claims can be maintained in these circumstances, it is helpful to reflect on specific situations where there have been methodologically determined variations in perceptions of poverty. While some participants asserted fixed notions of poverty throughout various research encounters, there were those whose responses varied based on the setting and nature of the interaction. Preto stands as an exemplification of the latter. As an interviewee he had a fixed and interesting view; yet, as a participant in different research forums his views oscillated between various positions. Preto in different contexts (some formal, and others

informal) produced four distinguishable notions of poverty. Within a structured research environment (a basic school classroom re-arranged to facilitate a focus group) an orthodox definition was initially voiced and poverty was defined monetarily (YFG 2 Notes). However, as the exercise became more visceral and informal the perception of poverty was transformed and living in Windsor itself was made synonymous with living in poverty. In another interactive context (a recorded one-on-one interview inside a parked car) where the discussion focused on life history and experiences Preto's view of poverty was infused with introspective interpretations. He represented poverty as strategically imposed marginality and an actively enclosed opportunity structure (Interview Transcript #21). Finally, there were many occasions where we informally conversed and joked at different hangout zones (sometimes alone and occasionally with others) about daily life in Windsor, the police and his aspirations. In these contexts, the definitions deployed, though they still retained personal elements, particularly reflected the popular discourses that characterise poverty as a life struggle. For example, in one discussion we had while at a 'hanging out' in the community, he expressed the opinion that poverty was an experience of "sufferation" and "hardship" (Informal Conversation with Preto, Field Diary Entry: Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> of June, 2008).

The questions that emerge from the illustration above are: does the contingent nature of responses render poverty imperceptible? In which (if any) of the characterisations can the *reality* of Preto's poverty be found? And can there be valid conclusions drawn from such labile and shifting definitions and interpretations? In discussing YFG1, I argued that the suspicion that was hurled onto the resource-based consensus due to its congruity with orthodox conceptualisations was the result of an errant and academically arrogant perspective. Furthermore, I posited that the discourses to which participants were exposed and the nature of their exchanges in the social economy made it likely that poverty would be perceived by many as a materially determined

condition. On the one hand, this proposition corresponds with Bourdieu's view that social experience "often becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways" and this then guides individuals in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu (Wacquant, 2005:316). On the other, it may simply reflect the conflicts of identity and the expedience of deploying particular discourses because of its increased utility, resonance or applicability in certain contexts. Either way, it may be argued that the contextually mediated vacillations between 'materiality', 'opportunity' and 'sufferation' in fact reflect the different alethic angles which constitute Preto's *poverty schemata*. Rather than rendering reality impenetrable, such distinct perspectives provide an opportunity to identify and explore different truth positions. This suggests that experiences are converted into perceptions through the interpretive tools available within different discourses of poverty. These undoubtedly inform the perceptions deployed in different contexts or from different subject positions.

The setting or environment is not the only modulatory thoroughfare in the co-construction of life histories and poverty accounts. Positionality is another integral aspect of research that cannot be discounted in a discussion on experiential evidence. If, as argued by Scott (1991:779), "it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience", then to evoke perceptions and beliefs by discussing lived experiences is also to insufflate the nuances of identity. As participants recall, explain or express, they position themselves along an axis (or axes) in relation to the intention(s) of the narrative. In this way, the locus of a view or a recollection is always the result of a process of negotiation which takes into account, as two of the many variables in a complex equation: (a) who is being told and (b) what will be made of the information. For example, in Auntie Nez's interview, her hesitation at divulging an aspect of her

life was a bold indicator that, inasmuch as a story was being told, an identity was being constructed and projected:

**Interviewer:** So explain what you mean by *hard*? Help me understand it?

**Auntie Nez:** What I would say –[pause]– when I used to live in Gray Pond, they used to go to school often. But now, like how I live down here for five months now. When I get her report, the report say she was absent too much. That time it was 700 dollars at morning time just for the two of them travel to Ochi and then Grey Pond. And plus I have him, 70 dollars for him. So it's too sticky. And yeah I get them move – I get them transferred for September to go St. Ann's Bay Primary.

**Interviewer:** Okay, okay

**Auntie Nez:** And the thing is this –[pause]– what would I say now –[pause]– If I say that, maybe if we are to get anything, we not going to get it –[pause]– Anyway, we trying to finish we house and, you know, things get slow. And that the reason why today I am to leave here with some cement to deck the top a little and –[pause]– But I can't have the one money and use it 'cause they not going to eat.

While it was easy for Auntie Nez to describe her difficulties with sending the children to school (a common theme within poverty accounts), there was a brief, but obvious reservation about placing the building of a house within this narrative. Though she knew I was not attached to any agency and was researching as part of a university degree, there was nevertheless, initial caution at introducing the idea that she (and her family) had the financial means to own land and build a house. Her main concern here was that by *becoming* someone who can afford to build a house she simultaneously *becomes* non-poor and so sheds the entitlements of impoverishment. Auntie Nez instinctively recognised within the official/governmental approach to deprivation, a trend also observed by Anderson (2001:39), where: "the premise that underlies much of current poverty reduction policy is the belief that it is possible to delineate target groups among the poor" and to

channel support to those who are defined to be *most* deprived or *most* "at risk".<sup>50</sup> Perhaps having calculated that I was not a threat to any aid she might receive, Auntie Nez excluded herself from being 'deserving' of assistance on the basis of belonging to a category of the 'absolute poor'. However, she quickly repositioned herself within another deserving category, that of the 'aspirational poor', who are not completely deprived, but are nevertheless engaged in a brutal struggle to overcome the obstacles of poverty. Interestingly, in the renegotiation of her location so as to sit squarely within the realm of the 'deprived but ambitious', the house is not at all peripheral. The difficult choices and sacrifices that have had to be made in sustaining the building effort are emblematic of the identity being projected and emblematic of her complex *experiencing* of deprivation.

The questions here are: what would have been the outcome if it had been determined that I was not a benign student researcher? Is the 'absolutely poor' Auntie Nez less real than a 'poor but aspirational' Auntie Nez? To reify either of these identities as the truth of Auntie Nez's status/experience around which it is possible to construct knowledge about poverty, would be a supine exercise in fatuity. Representing constructed identities as objective reality precludes a "critical examination of the workings of the ideological system" that encourages and facilitates the creation of these categories.<sup>51</sup> Also it inhibits an interrogation of how ideologies constitute "subjects who see and act in the world" (Scott, 1991:777). Rather than legitimising, and perhaps more problematically, *essentialising* Auntie Nez's claim to be a part of an aspirational poor 'class', it is possible to inquire what relational structures necessitate the construction of competing identities. The frames of inclusion and exclusion around poverty discourses cannot be considered

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<sup>50</sup> According to Anderson (2001), 'at risk' refers particularly to pregnant women, young children and more recently the disabled in isolation from the households they inhabit.

<sup>51</sup> The main ideological imperative that informs the official approach to poverty in Jamaica is the focus of the next section.



as elements of a positive-sum game. On the contrary, they are only able to shape self-perceptions (and therefore self-representations) and influence actions because they are interpreted as being fundamental to life chances and outcomes. Though Auntie Nez has entered this complex power game she is not static within it and will not be completely subjected to its rules. In defining herself within this system of representations, she begins to 'pick and choose' the locations to deploy, appropriate to the context. In so doing she co-opts the principles to legitimise her own ends while corrupting the original ideological intent of the category of the 'deserving'. This clever manoeuvring is a major challenge for the monetary imaginary which currently determines official poverty truths. The question Auntie Nez's account unwittingly but strategically throws at the reigning poverty regime is: will the market based imperative reject as deserving of aid those who are driven to make a better life for themselves (but cannot do it alone), in favour of those who have less, but are happy staying where they are?

The arguments presented are not attempting to erase or deny the 'realities' or structures extant in accounts of struggle and hardship. In fact, the point here has been to begin to *(re)contextualise* these entanglements where they might have been alienated from their discursive agnates. Like all the other interviewees in my research, both Preto and Auntie Nez are engaged in symbolic wars and they are involved in these contestations because they are both (though in different ways) immersed in processes of deprivation. Preto is static in his job as an assistant where other less experienced recruits have been upwardly mobile; this means he is unable to earn enough to support his mother and younger sister and begin to strategise for what he sees as a successful future. On the other hand, the livelihoods of Auntie Nez and her family have been imperilled by the financial and social costs of building a house. This investment continues to require ever more sacrifices from all members of the family and yet it is crucial to their sense of contentment within undulating tides of need. Also, neither Preto nor Auntie Nez has access to

their own running water, (legally connected) electricity, or good transportation networks from within their community. These *facts* do not teleologically designate either individual to the realm of the poor (deserving or undeserving) and they certainly do not inscribe on either, a particular type of poverty (absolute or relative). There are ideological systems with discursively constructed associations and with historically refined *logic of practice* which animate, structure, and sacralise the identities created and deployed within discourses of poverty. As such, to question the authority of experience is not to deny *the real*, but to ask of the always contingent and mitigated understandings of it, that its dissimulated machinations be revealed to the ordinary gaze.

## 5.4. The Symbolic Spaces of Poverty

Though they do not create objective structures, definitions structure relationships (by shaping self-perceptions and representations) within produced spaces and they influence relational outcomes (by applying rules and formality to categories) (Lefebvre, 1991). In this manner, definitions and the theories to which they are attached, provide the mechanisms for rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of calculation, evaluation and intervention (Miller & Rose, 1990:7). Thus, constructs must have central mediating concepts or *monads* through which perceptions are structured within the definitional space. In the realm of interpreting experiential routines or what Lefebvre refers to as “spatial practice” (Lefebvre, 1991), the ‘performance’ of daily interactions and exchanges has endowed the residents of Windsor with an uncanny competence in the repertoires of lack and need (e.g. “we need water”, “we need light”, “we need road”) and this informs a shared sense of poverty among many residents. Their sentiments have been coded into the wider society’s poverty *lingua franca* as ‘going through’ (or experiencing) ‘hardship’ and ‘sufferation’. These experiential/perceptual idioms also customarily reference the

quotidian difficulties of generally living in (or on) the margins (e.g. "Windsor full of pure sufferation"). Yet, the codifications (hardship, sufferation, tribulation, *etc.*) do not map directly onto an undifferentiated set of 'experiences of deprivation'. Indeed, the most glaring feature of the four poverty narratives presented is that how sufferation (or any of the other idioms) is 'lived' or 'perceived' is entirely variable and subjective. Ultimately, the "being-in-common" (Nancy, 1991) (e.g. the lack of water) that unites existentially is simultaneously also marked by difference in the perceiving or experiencing of that shared deprivation. Consequently, this space is constitutively, always shifting, always indeterminate, and always contested. This section highlights and explores the fact that the ideological imperative which gives meaning and purpose to the official poverty construct is resistant to *different ends*.

To invert Green's (2006:1110) logic, in the current global order, the *development episteme* is the totalising ideology that acts as the "frame through which countries, programmes and people are brought into" anti-poverty projects. This is abundantly clear in the declaration establishing Jamaica's poverty eradication programme:

Consultations have culminated in the development of "Jamaica's Policy Towards Poverty Eradication" (the Policy) and the "National Poverty Eradication Programme: A Community-Based Partnership Approach" (NPEP), both of which are being tabled [in parliament]. Both the Policy and the Programme are *predicated on the commitment to promote economic and social development*; to reduce the number of persons below the poverty line in targeted poor communities by 50 percent over three years; and to eradicate absolute poverty (as measured by selected criteria which assess the individual's inability to meet basic human needs) (Government of Jamaica, 1997, emphasis added).

This of course assumes that those targeted either share a commitment to the same end or are incapable of envisioning a future and so will acquiesce to the official design. Yet, in its almost exclusively economic basis, *development*, as it has been conceived and deployed has been

argued to be antithetic or even deleterious to “the sheer survival of large strata of the world’s peoples” (Escobar, 2005:139). In Jamaica, the development monolith is engaged in an ongoing struggle to colonise the noetic domain of deprivation (partly through the poverty discourse). This is essentially a battle to capture the local ‘grammar’ along one tradition of thought and to project carefully crafted images of where the poor are now and where they will be in the future based on that ideology. Yet, Foucault’s (1982) contributions on the relations of domination have demonstrated that “power and freedom’s refusal to submit” are inextricably linked. The power relationship or symbolic struggle at issue here has on one side a ‘disciplinary force’ and on the other side, “constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (1982:790). Informed by this observation, it is being argued here that the deployment of an ideologically determined development as an *end* in the fight against poverty is the forceful imposition of finality in an open melioristic space. The casuistry involved in this attempted occupation cannot but be exposed whenever there are close inspections of the ideological *materiel* that hold the development integument in its place of dominance.

Particularly in a squatter settlement such as Windsor, with the already noted peregrinations of the inhabitants (as seen in the individual narratives) and where complex identities are constantly in flux, the translocality of the local seems to, in some senses, impel the *impossibility of community*. This invalidates the attempt to damage or dissolve disparity and impose a homogeneous developmental essence into the breaches. The alternative may be to begin to understand the commonalities that exist in this concatenation of inveterate differences. A useful tool in this endeavour may be found in Mouffe’s work. In her articulation of the *Democratic Paradox*, Mouffe sets in contrast two forms of antagonism. The first is “antagonism proper – which takes place between enemies, that is persons who have no common symbolic space” and the second, “agonism”, creates the opportunity for an inclusive or plural community in a way that consensus

cannot, since consensus is the elision of conflict and the crystallisation of hegemonic power relations (2005:49).

Agonism, according to Mouffe (2005:13), involves relations not “between enemies but between *adversaries*, adversaries being defined in a paradoxical way as *friendly enemies*, that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organise this common symbolic space in a different way”. There can be no *real* separation of this analytical binary as experience is necessarily ‘substantiated’ (verbalised or otherwise represented) through symbols and symbols must themselves be the observable/interpretable ‘substance’ of experience. Yet, the fissures immanent in the constitution of these lived/living spaces orient themselves toward Nancy’s idea that there can be an existence that is “*in common*” without ever absorbing them into a “*common substance*” (1991:xxxvii) and at the same time towards Mouffe’s “mixed game” which is “part collaborative” and “part conflictual” (1999:756).

In the individual narratives outlined earlier, Auntie Nez pointed to the disappointment of being unable to “move on” in life: “from I am small, I am carrying water on my head and now I come back same way” (Auntie Nez, Interview Transcript #7), while Prento remarked on his occupational immobility relative to the others he works with: “you will never become a salesman, not when you come from Windsor” (Prento, Interview Transcript #21). In assessing mobility, Auntie Nez used her past and present circumstances as referent points while Prento positioned himself alongside his peers at work. To add another comparison, Larry commented on an ideal situation where he would have the ‘freedom’ to make life decisions and to participate in activities of symbolic importance in his community such as, building “a little house” or throwing “a little partner” (Larry,

Interview Transcript #18), whereas Gangalee spoke of a “renewed” or “futuristic” mind that would allow a community to work together to “build up our own economy, and our own resources” (Gangalee, Interview Transcript #6). Therefore, both views of progression were immersed in a sense of community. However, while Larry’s vision was informed by communal symbols of success, Gangalee’s was rooted in Rastafarian religiosity. Not only did all four individuals express varying perceptions of a desirable end (*i.e.* each had their own view of *progress*) but they all arrived at their subjective positions from different routes.

Governmental departments (particularly those with “Development” in their titles), frequently operate as if their location within the social order is enough to successfully command the loyalty of targeted groups and have often overlooked the importance of popular support for the success of development initiatives. As such, they frequently deny the ‘agency’ of the proposed beneficiaries and neglect the complex dynamics of the subjective ‘will to improve’. To use Latour’s (1986:268) reasoning “people who are ‘obeyed’ discover what their power is really made of when they start to lose it. They realise, but too late, that it was ‘made of’ the wills of all the others”. In numerous instances the positions taken by individuals on their ‘progress’ out of poverty will reflect those of the designs of the development orthodoxy. However, in other situations individuals or groups may have personal (*e.g.* religious) or other locally negotiated interests and this means it is essential to consider the ideological imperatives that inform the symbolic space and shape desired outcomes. Important insights may be derived from Elias’ (1995) view on the *process of civilisation*. Elias distinguishes between a “good life” (here made synonymous with ‘development’) and a “better life” (here synonymous with open-ended ‘progress’). He postulates that it would be possible to argue interminably about the meaning of a ‘good life’. The same is true of development as those within its varying schools and traditions have elaborated and effectuated myriad versions of their ideology. Nevertheless, there is always attached to these

expressions “an absolute and final state. It mostly represents an ideal. The expression a ‘better life’ on the other hand refers to a social process in the development of which living conditions do not become good in the absolute sense, but become better with reference to an earlier phase” or to some other referent (Elias, 1995:8).

The marketised model of development has been equated with “progress” or “improvement” and this tends to create anti-poverty initiatives which have appealing symbolic language. Yet, the implementation of programmes often alienates the intended beneficiaries, who then often respond by boycotting or subverting the process.<sup>52</sup> Foucault (1982:790) cautions against the aggrandisement of instances of dissonance as expressions of “an essential freedom” since “it would be better to speak of an “agonism” – of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle, less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyses both sides than a provocation”. The implication for the understanding of poverty is clear: there is a need to remove finality from representations of progress and in so doing, to ideologically ‘liberalise’ the conceptualisation of poverty (and therefore the desired non-poverty outcome) by recognising that subjective interests and wills tend to result in disparate objectives. YFG1 showed the possibility that residents may validly view employment and income as their route to progress; it is just as likely that others will have a different perspective. To ignore this important component of difference and to assert instead that progress out of poverty (as officially defined) is really only one thing (*i.e.* development), is counterproductive for an endeavour seeking to comprehend how deprivation and the relations underlying it are to be tackled.

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<sup>52</sup> I witnessed a number of incidents throughout my fieldwork which are illustrative of this ambiguous symbolic struggle. Two examples (extracts from my Field Diary) are presented in Appendix C and referred to as my “Encounters with Development”.

## 5.5. Conclusion

The “islands of meaning” that are sculpted from reality’s “experiential continua” (Zerubavel, 1996) are aimed at capturing “the essence of an object by relating it to its genus proximum (*i.e.* the closest superordinate class) and naming its differentia specifica (specific difference from other species within this class)” (Altrichter *et al*, 2002:126). For example, Anderson, writing under the auspices of the PIOJ, reports that it is absolutely essential to avoid “confusion” between those *in poverty* and those *in need*. In making the case, it is argued that this distinction is important because households which declare themselves to be in need are likely to spend “at least twice the per capita amount” as those defined as the poor (Anderson, 2000:84). Thus, the label poverty is, in practice, exclusively reserved for the *lowest common denominators* (in terms of income/consumption) among those who are economically deprived. The most troubling element in these definitional systems is that the PIOJ (2008:2) has admitted and practiced in its mapping and measurement exercise that “*both consumption below the poverty line and high unmet needs may be loosely labelled as poverty*”. Yet, the state’s anti-poverty apparatus is not made to even *loosely* apply to those with “high unmet needs” (*e.g.* Levy and Ohls (2007) assessment of The Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) shows that it is targeted at those determined “the poorest”). How does research on poverty proceed in this environment?

This chapter stepped back from a direct engagement of the operations of the reigning paradigm in order to evaluate how knowledge on poverty is produced in research. It first examined some contradictions in the participatory approach (as I understood and practiced it) which was initially central to this study as a means of arriving at the ‘poor’s lived definition of poverty’. Secondly, it shows how the consensual direction of such endeavours tend toward a false representation of



results as the 'poor's voice' from what was always interactively generated. In addition, through individual narratives, it was maintained that participatory efforts aimed at the 'poor's definition' are misaligned with the protean and polysemous nature of poverty. Then, the social relations within various research contexts were explored which further confirmed the conclusion that gaining knowledge through dialogue is a dialogical accomplishment, a co-production. Finally, the chapter explored the ideological imperative of poverty and illustrated that even the 'in-common' experiences of deprivation are occupied by differences which militate against the homogenising intent of *development*.

Instead of leaving Windsor with a clear knowledge of the lived experiences of the residents and a "local definition of poverty" which was found *in situ*, I departed with fixed uncertainties. Sure that because the construct, 'poverty', would in itself act upon the identities and actions of actors, the eliciting and analysis of ideas through a number of participatory instruments (however well designed and implemented) would be woefully inadequate. Sure also that the invasion of my own 'co-produced' version of poverty which may have been granted axiomatic legitimacy by claims to the authority of experience, would not at all have been consensual and impermeable. This is because *in essence* experiences are always indefinite and negotiated spaces. I gave up on finding a single and encompassing definition in this locality, but I did find multiple definitions, multiple perceptions and multiple ideological imperatives. I may have attempted to force a fixed definition out of the amorphous penumbrae, but it would be one that overlooked complex power relations and silenced important voices. Therefore the decision was made to begin exploring the hidden and obvious currents flowing through the different perceptions of poverty and to ask questions about the different interactions that constituted them.

The chapter has adopted a heuristic approach, at each stage propelled by the insights from the former and developing the considerable momentum needed to confidently eschew the current conceptualisation of poverty and to invite speculation and debate on a revision based on “agonistic” concepts which would in turn produce a ‘working definition’. ‘Working’ not because of its nascence, but because of the recognition that processes of deprivation are so complex and dynamic as to escape fixity, and ‘working’ because the project of advancement and the complete eradication of poverty is aspirational – the end of poverty is always a *work in progress*.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Spatial Deprivation and Individual Poverty in Windsor**

## 6.1. Introduction

The spatial connotation attributed to poverty by participants in the second youth focus group session (*i.e.* the claim ‘everybody in Windsor is poor’, assessed in the previous chapter), is not at all an original theme in poverty studies in Jamaica (see, Moser & Holland, 1997). Additionally, a number of audits conducted on ‘conditions’ that the poor live in have shown that the field has not been blind to the ostensible aspects of the geography of poverty. Yet, following Massey (1984:4), it is extremely important that social scientists move beyond terse inventories of problems in localities and recognise “the fact that the processes they study are constructed, reproduced and changed in a way which involves distance, movement and spatial differentiation”. This chapter attempts to take steps in that direction through an analysis of the interaction between space and impoverishment which has largely been confined to insignificance due to the crippling regulation of the academic and political afflatus by the strictures of *discipline*. Admittedly, such an investigation demands a high level of theoretical funambulism as there must be a recognition of fact that particular places are situated within a wide range of socio-spatial relations, yet at the same time the research must avoid an inimical movement across scales which lacks “an acknowledgement of the different ways in which the social and the physical interact at each level” (Smith & David, 1995:468).

There are four main areas of concern in this chapter. The first point of call is an assessment of the abstraction of the ‘poor person’ from a relationship to space. It is interesting that while the poor are not given a formal place-identity in theories of poverty, they are often unable to escape the deprivations and social denigration occasioned by association with the ‘poor places’ they inhabit. How spatiality became an issue of concern in this research is the second area of concern

that is addressed. The third section of this chapter specifically addresses the implications of spatiality for relations of deprivation and highlights the ways in which representations of space and orientations towards 'poor places' can exacerbate dispossession both materially and symbolically. The fourth section critically engages with some of the ways in which social relations naturalise the devaluation of communities through processes such as political disembodiment and *social death*. This relegates residents of maligned places to foraging on (or outside) the extremities of legitimate social action for recognition and access to rights.

### **6.1.1 Brodber on the Jamaican Yard: Unveiling the Inside (Spatial Arrangements) as a Reflection of the Outside (Societal Arrangements)**

In 1975, Erna Brodber, a social work theorist, published an authoritative evaluation of the geo-social unit known in Jamaica as, the 'Yard'. Brodber (1975:56) sought to understand both government and tenement yards, not only as a residential unit for low income Kingstonians, but as an extremely complex "problem solving agency" which "provided emotional and material support for the dwellers therein and dictated community action of some kind to deal with everyday problems of existence". The yard was viewed as a kind of residential arrangement for low income groups where "novitiates into the wage economy wait to have their labour hired and their goods bought" (Brodber, 1975:9). Within this frame it was assessed as a psycho-cultural experience unique to the Jamaican and in particular, to the Kingstonian.

Brodber (1975:50) contends that the Jamaican culture ties upward social mobility ineluctably to geographic mobility, "the most elementary stage of which begins with yards". Acknowledging this predisposition enables an understanding of universal denigration of these dwellings and reveals

why occupants would “rate themselves as being at the bottom of the social ladder”. Here, geographical organisation becomes representative of wider social relations. Indeed, there exists no space in a hierarchical society that is not itself hierarchical, and that does not express multiple “hierarchies and social distances in a form that is more or less distorted, and above all disguised by the *naturalisation effect* produced by the long-term inscription of social realities in the natural world” (Bourdieu, 1999a:124).

Bourdieu’s seminal, *The Berber House or the World Reversed*, exposed the symbolic domination that informed the design of the Kabyle house by showing the private and intimate space as a “microcosm organised according to the same oppositions which govern the rest of the universe” (Bourdieu, 1970:160). In a similar manner, Brodber turns the tenement yard inside out, revealing how the historical, the social and the economic all interact, within, through and around the physical structures of the dwelling. Her conclusions were primarily directed toward a social work audience, but they nevertheless had and continue to have significant implications for any field of research concerned with deprivation and its effects:

Working within the notion of the yard would be attended by a shift in *orientation* to our clients. If we begin to view yards positively as potential sources of strength rather than as abominations, we would begin to view our clients as human beings in the process of actualisation rather than as statistics of social pathology...Social work using this notion of the yard is likely to involve a methodological shift from traditional social work practice. *The client would be now, not so much the individual, but the individual-in-his-community* (Brodber, 1975:60-61, emphasis added).

‘Taking the social inside’ has not been the preferred direction of research when examining the places inhabited by the poor. Rather, various approaches to poverty have treated the concentration of material and social misery in certain geographical locations as either an accident of history or as deprivations that naturally occur, in areas plagued by the conditions of economic

decline, state retrenchment, political abuse, negative stigmatisation, and other such social ills. This may be seen in the Planning Institute of Jamaica's "poverty map" which uses a number of "alternative indices" to statistically tabulate and measure the excessive convergence of various types of deprivations in places (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2008). Scholarly and 'expert' orthodoxy militates against a reading of the physical as a verdict on relations within the social body as a whole. As a result, most approaches fail to understand that physical structures are a construct of, an ossuary for and an influence on social processes. Far from being intuitive, Brodber's 1975 proposals for examining and addressing the complex problems of low income communities, more than three decades later, remain truly revolutionary (or even mutinous) to prevailing thought and practice. It is this concern which has been taken up in this chapter as inspired by discussions with the community members themselves.

However, before moving on to discussing poverty and spatial relations it is imperative to point out that the aim here is not to project as all pervasive – and in so doing essentialise – the privative relations described below; nor is it being claimed that they are more pernicious than other forms of impoverishment and dispossession. Furthermore, this chapter is not aimed at defining 'spatial poverty' or at describing all/most of the 'spatial relations of impoverishment'. On the contrary, the intention is to reveal through the experiences extracted from a case study, that concepts and definitions of poverty are incomplete without adequate consideration of the role of space in material and symbolic processes of deprivation.

## 6.2. Space and 'The Poor': The (Dis)location of *Homo Pauperis*

It was argued in a preceding chapter ("Sense Mek Before Book") that Neo-liberal economists, Marxists and Radical theorists in the Caribbean have almost all huddled around some sacralised version of the poverty line as a point of departure in their respective studies. However, even within the income/consumption schemata where the poverty line concept resides, there are varying perceptions on the intricacies of poverty. Arguments range from specific propositions claiming "poverty is synonymous to not having livestock" (Haaland & Keddeman quoted in Jamal, 1990:833) to more conventional definitions such as "'poverty' can be said to exist in a given society when one or more persons do not attain a level of material well-being deemed to constitute a reasonable minimum by the standards of that society" (Ravallion, 1992:4). What is assumed by the utility maximisation principle which inoculates these understandings, is that those with access to a predetermined minimum set of resources (the exact nature of these will be a matter of incessant debate), should, by being frugal, be able to acquire enough goods so as to be/become non-poor. A second coagulant, but underexplored aspect of the varying economic approaches is that in their conceptualisations, 'the poor' – *i.e.* those below a predetermined minimum level – are actively engaged in a type of spatial relation. For example, some Somali farmers have a need for livestock borne out of the specific conditions of their region (Jamal, 1990) whereas in large areas of Russia where the annual average temperature is below zero, 'the poor' require relatively expensive deer meat as part of their complex consumption bundle (Ravallion & Lokshin, 2006). Even though spatiality can, in this way, be seen as pivotal in determining the nature of needs and their value, the personality ascribed to the poor *dis-locates* identity and individuals are conceived *in abstracto*, meaning the poor in this paradigm are constructed as independent of a direct relationship with their environment as structured by their society. Consequently, neither the essential 'character' nor the general characteristics assigned to the



pauper respond to robust theoretical and practical logic; instead they seem to answer the call of 'implementability' by making behaviour predictable and aid worthiness easily assessable.

The poverty orthodoxy in policy and theory operates through a distinct concept of the poor which is an abstraction homologous to *homo economicus*, the assumption of a 'rational man' upon which economists have built their discipline. Dominant conceptualisations of poverty have, in a similar way, designed and hypostatized *homo pauperis* as an individuated rational agent operating on a scale between (or depending on the theory used, a binary of): (a) the undeserving – lazy, arrogant, sinister and unwilling to participate in moral and economic spheres (Baptist *et al*, 1999:16); and (b) the deserving – hardworking, ambitious and morally upright but unfortunately, structurally excluded from participation in the market due to inefficiencies or otherwise as a result of an 'acceptable' incapacity (e.g. age or disability). In these cases the poor are constructed as 'informed' or 'informable' actors who are in all places only marginally (if at all) enabled in economic exchanges. This rationality-based calculus sustains and is sustained by the definition of poverty as a discrete condition of hunger, need and want (sometimes the word multidimensional is used). To retain universal applicability, the character of *homo pauperis* is divorced (even if unwittingly) from the mutating effects of 'place of origin', even though many specific deprivations within locations are usually accounted for. But if this universal character (often referred to as the 'global poor') comes from *nowhere* but resides *everywhere*, then it cannot be said to exist *anywhere*. The position here is that the monolithic edifice that has been formed out of this sophisticated contrivance dissolves into a facile and fatuous simulacrum whenever processes of deprivation are investigated within a complex of social, historical and spatial relations.

Sayer (2000) pointed out that unlike some of the natural sciences, social scientists cannot conduct their studies under tightly controlled conditions and so there is instead a reliance on “abstraction and careful conceptualisation”. After abstracting variables and examining how they combine and intersect it is essential to “return to the concrete, many-sided object and make sense of it” (Sayer, 2000:19). This latter, yet fundamental component of social science operation has been largely ignored in dominant modes of conceptualising poverty. Instead, an individual or household will remain fixed as a unit that “chooses its consumption to maximize utility given its (unique) group assignment” (Ravallion & Lokshin, 2006:4). Bhabha, citing Arendt, comments on the impossibility of this kind of independent rational agent:

We can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion; and although this agent frequently remains the subject, the hero of the story, *we can never point unequivocally to [the agent] as the author of the outcome* (Bhabha, 1992:143).

Displaced and therefore divested of the constitutive social relations which are intricately and inextricably interwoven in space, *homo pauperis* becomes trapped within what may be referred to as a “generalised condition of homelessness” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992:9). The result is an ‘overdetermined’, ‘unaccommodated’ and ultimately hollow ‘poor figure’ – a conceptualisation which facilitates and expedites the important processes of identification, measurement and triage, but one which fails to recognise or contemplate the Delphic nature of the poor’s relational immanence.

It is perhaps pertinent to close the section by reflecting on an extremely poignant illustration of the rupture in the prescription of poverty. In example drawn from an interview, the respondent threw light on the fact that in the perspective of many deprived persons, academic and official definitional practices are not symbolically benign:

**Interviewer:** Do you consider yourself poor?

**Kelly:** No.

**Interviewer:** Okay, you are not poor at all?

**Kelly:** None at all.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so what about the community?

**Kelly:** Well if they consider that they are poor, then it's just that. They poor then, but I don't want nobody poor me (Interview Transcript #10).

Kelly had earlier explained that her family had been assisted by the government's PATH programme which, through its rigid scoring formula, targets only the most severely deprived households in the society (Levy & Ohls, 2007). Her assertion: "I don't want nobody poor me", was immediately recognised as significant because it corresponded with sentiments expressed in the participatory literature where the respondents rejected the poor/poverty label (Frank, 2007; Moser & Holland, 1997). However, Kelly had done something radically different: she had converted poor from an adjective with descriptive properties to a verb so as to suggest that characteristics alien to her personhood were being imposed on her. In this skilful inflection, poverty was conceived not as an objective reality, or undeniable condition that people exist in. Rather, it was a status ascribed through specific cultural and scientific processes. Kelly's recognition of this significant relational component of deprivation and her refusal be *poored*, is a response to the "symbolic power" which is able to "consecrate" or "produce sacred social divides and orders" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:210). That is, she throws into the spotlight the 'constructive work' of those researchers and policy makers who are in the business of *pooring people*.<sup>53</sup> There are extremely significant removals (from relations e.g. gender) and conferrals (of characteristics e.g. income) congenital to being *poored* that need to be explored. The discussion here takes aim at some of the processes within the poverty construct and how they work through and are experienced in *poor places*, even while there is official omission of the impoverishing force of spatial relations.

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<sup>53</sup> A number of theorists have commented on processes that may be called *pooring*. See page 17.

### 6.3. The Spatial Dilemma: Poverty of Persons and Poverty of Place

It is difficult not to be aware of spatiality and poverty in Jamaica, particularly with the comingling of political, drug and gang violence with economic desperation and crippling symbolic deficits in certain communities in Kingston. Urban ghettos or “garrison communities” are regularly featured in the news and the enormity of the sufferation of inhabitants is very often told from the perspective of deejays (many of whom grew up in one or another of these areas). These communities are also frequently in the gaze of academics who have analysed various aspects of the politics, violence and poverty in Kingston (see for e.g., Clarke, 1983; Figueroa & Sives, 2002; Wint, 2002; Henry-Lee, 2005; Clarke, 2006). Yet, in these representations, the prevailing idea has been that there is a high concentration of individual poverty which is exacerbated by and which exacerbates other social ills. While there have been commentaries on the “stigma” in these deprived areas which restrict opportunities (Wint, 2002; Levy, 1996; Moser & Holland, 1997), this relation is not usually a central topic of investigation. Symbolic deficits are typically taken to be analytically peripheral to the *real problems*. Even if they count, they are after all, only *symbolic*. This is the intellectual approach I had adopted entering the Windsor community. The main concern for my research was how individuals viewed their poverty and/or the poverty of others and how these perspectives coincided with the dominant concepts.

My first in-the-field awareness of spatial relations within deprivation came in the form of the outburst in a focus group session, “no matter what you have or don’t have, anybody that live in Windsor must poor!” (Buju, YFG2 Notes). At the time it was viewed as interesting and a good topic of discussion but factually unsound. However, it became increasingly important as data from other focus group sessions and numerous interview transcripts indicated an all-encompassing or

community-based aspect in local descriptions of poverty and hardships. The views expressed in this material interrupted the direction of the research and demanded a rethinking of relations surrounding poverty. This process eventually led to the inclusion of space as a key area of concern, but not before confronting and eluding the aporia in conventions of thought which preclude certain types of spatial analyses in examinations of deprivation.

In two structured focus group sessions, 20 adult residents of Windsor (ten in each), were asked whether and in what ways they were poor. Most of the participants tied poverty to money, food, or employment. However, later when asked what specifically were the most immediate daily “hardships” they faced, economic issues were almost never mentioned. Instead, the lack of a proper road, the lack of (legal) electricity, the lack of access to individual water and sanitary facilities as well as the conditions of their housing were identified as key struggles and dominated the discussions (AFG 1 and 2 Notes). This bifurcation of poverty and hardship, though seemingly innocuous, became a major theoretical obstacle. If lack of money, food and employment were the major causes of poverty, it would have been expected that the most pressing ‘hardships’ of life would be identified in the difficulties associated with gaining access to and/or ‘making ends meet’ with those resources. By distinguishing between the suffering caused by material lack and spatial hardships the participants were in effect proposing two different types of deprivations. The first of these was *poverty* as dominantly defined and the second was officially anonymous. Was this a strategic cry for help in developing the community’s infrastructure, or was there a genuine separation in conceptualising impoverishment as a condition of: (a) personal financial lack and (b) spatial deficits? Granting that separation, why was the latter given priority?

There were three reasons for the analytical perplexity concerning the distinction that arose between poverty and hardship. Firstly, having been in the community for a few months and personally witnessing the difficulties being faced on a daily basis by many of these very participants, a good idea had been formed of what their 'hardships' would look like – the responses contrasted with those expectations. Secondly, believing that poverty was an empirically identifiable ontological category which was being misinterpreted by academics and policymakers, my intention in the research was to locate poverty *in reality* and show how this veritable truth (as found in the experiences of the poor) was not commensurate with orthodox views. The groups threw this aspect of the research in flux. They had identified 'poverty' (which I was in search of), but had also identified something else that they deemed even more enervative – and it was not being called 'poverty'. Finally, I was seeking to investigate the enabling and privative relations in which the residents of Windsor were engaged, but my understanding was limited to interactions with established social and economic institutions and so there was no awareness of a realm of complex symbolic exchanges that shaped meanings and structured thoughts. In particular, there was no appreciation of the role of spatiality as anything more than configurations in and around which interactions take place. With this ossification of thought, the distinction between poverty and hardship could not be interpreted.

The message being sent was not being heard, but not because I was necessarily opposed to the ideas. Rather, the cause was the lack of ability to unlock my own subservience to conventional ways of thinking about the relations of deprivation. Particularly beguiling in this equation was the fact that I was approaching the research from a critical position and from that standpoint it seemed that there was already a natural opposition to orthodoxy which reduced the need for critical interrogation of my own poverty preconceptions and assumptions. In this way, I was another victim of the well oiled machinery of self-delusion and disciplinary arrogance.

The separation remained theoretically recalcitrant for some time and could only be accounted for as a product of errors in method and context. The only possible resolution depended on an intriguing level of subliminal bargaining by participants: 'here was an outsider researching poverty, why not make our foremost concerns those injustices he is best placed to draw attention to and more easily remedied, as opposed to mentioning issues such as the inability to gain adequate (if any) employment and the related lack of access to education and healthcare which we know he cannot possibly influence'. This was an explanation that was never satisfactory, not least because the trend had been picked up over two focus group sessions. But primarily, it was deemed unacceptable because it was an evaluation designed to assuage my own inadequacies and to evade what seemed inexplicable. There was no genuine conviction that the participants were being surreptitious or tactical in their responses. Unredeemed by the method and context explanation, the separation was classified as a research anomaly. Moreover, it became possible to move on from this 'analytical crisis' because my research design changed soon after these sessions.

Even though the problem took a different format, a strong spatial element to deprivation was evident in numerous interviews and this forced an assessment of the blurred boundary that separated perspectives on the poverty of the individual and the poverty of the locality. In replying to questions such as: "why are you poor?" or "are you poor?" some respondents moved well beyond conventional resource-based conceptions to proclaim: "I am poor 'cause I come from Windsor" (Buju, Interview Transcript #22); or "we all poor, we all poor here, only poor people live here" (Neesy, Interview Transcript #16). Interviewees in these and many other cases were categorically *placing* poverty in a way that had not been done in the adult focus groups mentioned

above. Particularly baffling was the fact that many of those who at times described poverty as nothing other than living in Windsor, also at other stages in their interviews defined poverty as a lack of income. For example, when interviewing Ryan, a 21 year old lifeguard, there was at first a conventional approach:

**Interviewer:** In terms of growing up, you was poor? How was it?

**Ryan:** Well you see for me, I wasn't poor. It was kind of easy 'cause my mother and my step father was working and thing, you know. And him finance certain thing still. I never face it like plenty man round here that nobody for them not working. They can't go school or nothing.

Yet later, when asked about the difficulties of the community, his tone and position in relation to poverty changed:

**Interviewer:** What do you think is the biggest problem for young people like yourself in the community?

**Ryan:** Well they brand us you know! They hate this community, they are out there giving us a fight and because of that we have to live in poverty (Interview Transcript #11).

Why were there inconsistent views on poverty within the same interviews? Why were issues of place so emotive? Why would 'branding' or a 'bad name' for Windsor, necessarily translate into poverty? The interview transcript had an advantage over the focus groups due to the fact that, whereas the group sessions had to be analysed as a recollected interaction between multiple principals with an associated body of worksheets and notes, the interview could be easily digested as a holistic 'text'. Specific statements were read in their context as part of an entire transcript with the aim of understanding the different positionings within the interaction (Opie, 1992). According to Opie (1992:57), highlighting disjuncture instead of avoiding it may be a way of sharing interpretive control with the informant. Following this reasoning, there was an attempt to appreciate the circumstances in which the opposing views were uttered. It was found that on



many of the occasions where poverty was equated with the community, the claims were framed as confrontational ‘speech acts’. These were more than opinions on impoverishment; they were acts of resistance to frames and scales of poverty which denied inclusion of certain types of suffering as worthy of consideration. Additionally, they called attention to symbolic and material deficits which were collective in nature and opposed the individualism of orthodox approaches to poverty.

All definitions are social constructs, and so the dominant definition of poverty as a fixed ‘condition’ is not being critiqued for being an intellectual ‘work of art’. The claim here is that through sophisticated processes of *pooring* this artifice has disguised the entirely contingent nature of its constitution. By clothing its deformities in the regalia of rigorous (qualitative and quantitative) expert-led research and mobilising state machinery behind the concoction, there is an extremely virulent hypostatisation and essentialisation of *homo pauperis*. But because ‘reality’ is unruly, perceptions of it can never be completely domesticated by theoretical and practical fortifications, however well resourced and defended. Inevitably gaps appear and different types of resistances take shape within them, each with its own level of resonance and veracity. Maybe the most pungent defiance comes from the interviewees who propose that living in Windsor is synonymous to being in poverty. Provenance is not innocuous. The contradictions that were evident in many interviews appeared to be the respondents’ deliberate or unwitting push against the boundaries of the orthodox definition of poverty. In their overtly confrontational tone a clear statement was being made: *even though it is applicable to some parts of our lives, the exclusively materialist conceptualisation of poverty is inadequate*. The implication of this is that, deprivations caused by lack of income are not the only important factors in their impoverishment. To live in Windsor, according to this view, is to exist in a kind of deontological abyss that in addition to material lack, confers a type of sufferation on individuals which needs to be recognised and addressed when

considering poverty. This is a difficult proposition to ignore and will be the focus of the final section of this chapter.

Another instance of resistance may be seen in the separation between 'poverty' and 'hardship' made by the participants in the two adult focus groups mentioned earlier. There is an economicist constituent amidst the large number of poverty discourses operating (and competing) in Windsor. The proclivity towards economicist definitions of poverty is (with analytical hindsight) understandable when it is considered that the governmental organisations with which Windsor residents interact most frequently, all frame the issue of poverty in exclusively monetary terms (see Jamaica Observer, 2009; Jamaica Gleaner, 2008). Since thinking has been perpetually assaulted by facts and figures which naturalise the centrality of money in questions of poverty; for many individuals, poverty can only be understood as a condition of inadequate financial means or a lack of those resources which would be acquired with an 'adequate income'. However, accompanying their financial insecurity, the inhabitants of Windsor lack or have restricted access to amenities which in surrounding communities, are so basic as to be taken for granted. These are much more than simply other types of deprivations and in fact they take on an ontological intendment – the significance of this was missed when the separation was first observed. 'Windsor as poverty' became monadic to this research as it is in understanding the intricacies of and giving credence to the 'spatial hardships' being highlighted by these participants, that an interesting and overlooked dimension of processes of dispossession was revealed. That is, the power of places and things in places to aid in the creation of "structures of feelings" (Williams, 1975, 1961) which align with 'representations of space' to shape impoverished identities.

It may be argued that, alongside physical structures there exist more or less identifiable “structures of feeling”. In one of his earliest applications of the term Williams (1961:48) used the concept to describe “a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression” but he was also careful to point out that structures of feeling are not “possessed in the same way by the members in the community”. It is in this sense that it is possible to consider the differentiated but “very deep and wide passions” (Williams, 1961:48) which are attached to places and they emerge from the ways in which space is (or can be) lived/lived in. Many of the residents of Windsor view the physical deficits of their community not only as a matter of lack of resources, but also as a constant reminder of their worth within the social order and their position in the social hierarchy. They ask how it is possible that communities can spring up around them and be provided with the basic amenities they lack. They recognise, better than academics generally do, that there is an intrinsic antinomy in the fact that as ‘poor people’ their poverty is being described as having nothing to do with where they live and everything to do with the decisions they have made or will make in life (their ‘agency’), yet at the same time, their place of residence inscribes ineluctably upon them deprivation, alterity and worthlessness in the eyes of the world.

Understanding the power of discourse without reducing the data to an incorporeal textual social world was integral to unravelling the mystery of the role of space in relations of deprivation in Windsor. This in turn led to a recognition of the ‘separation’ (in the focus groups) and the ‘contradictions’ (in the interviews) as sequela of major interstices in possibilities of thought about poverty. Additionally, it enabled an apperception of the fact that relations of domination can act through spaces to inscribe the marks of ‘poverty’ on the bodies and minds of individuals. With these eruditions it became possible to assess the consequences of *homo pauperis*’ spatial alienation.

## 6.4. The 'Representations of Space' and the 'Orienting' of Places

### 6.4.1 The 'Representations of Space' and Poverty

Lefebvre (1991:38) elaborated on *representations of space* as a “conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived”. The representations effected by professionals become “the dominant space in any society”, meaning that a dismissive and stolid attitude toward residents may easily exist alongside developmental/benevolent intentions. These are ‘compossible’ dispositions because in the eyes of many journalists, social workers, politicians and development practitioners, localities like Windsor are *poor places* – they are largely comprised of the acerbic human dross which occupies areas plagued by material deprivation. If it is, as Bourdieu (1992:143) argued, that even the simplest of linguistic exchanges brings into play a complex “web of historical relations between the speaker who has been endowed with a specific authority and an audience which recognises this authority to varying degrees”, then it is appropriate to identify the articulations from ‘expertise’ as the apogee of relations in representation of spaces. Although the ‘experts’ in their professional capacities are the authority on ‘reality’, their conceptions and in turn their representations are not facts that can be separated from values. According to Taussig (1980:4), it requires no great effort of mind to read social relations into the materiality purported by professionals. How spaces are conceived may answer to scientific stimuli, but science itself must bow down to historicity and to socially determined truths. The categories of thought which, with the stamp of professional authority, deny Windsor a place among valued spaces are all the time worked upon by preconceptions resident in the ‘natural order’ even as they work to *represent* reality.

The individuals who live in the community are all too aware of their conceptual and practical marginalisation. Field notes on informal conversations, transcripts of formal interviews and innumerable diary entries are punctuated with the expressions: "...’cause they see us as squatters...", "...’cause we live on capture land..." or "...they call us squatters...". In an interaction with one of the many unemployed youths of the community, these representations are brought to the fore:

**Interviewer:** You think the community have different type of poor people living here?

**Deejay:** Different type of poor people? I don’t know still – [pause] – Is a good question still, ’cause you have different poor for true. ’Cause you have some that can find night dinner at night time. They might can find it ’cause they work in a better job than some – [pause] – But when you check it out, everybody is the same thing.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So what would you say ’bout the community then?

**Deejay:** Like how I would describe it or so?

**Interviewer:** Yes, how you describe it?

**Deejay:** Is not really a poor community, some don’t poor. The community have – [pause] – Is a poor community. You can say is a poor community, you can say that. All of we up here poor because is capture land we live on, you know? Is not buy land or so. That’s why you see we may need wall house [concrete house], like you would go some other place that would build with cement, or so. This is capture land, you know, yeah?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah, I know.

**Deejay:** So you going to see more board house, or so – [pause] – So I going to say is a poor community ’cause from you live on capture land they going to look on you as squatters (Interview Transcript #2).

In this case, there was initial hesitation to categorise the entire community as poor. However, the conceptions attached to living on “capture land” which permeate the society and inform self-perceptions override the distinctions arising from differences in access to income/employment,

education or health opportunities. Having material wealth cannot erase the poverty conferred when “they look on you as squatters”. As such, DeeJay concluded that everybody is poor: “if you check it out, everybody is the same”. In this estimation, to *belong* in Windsor, is by that very fact, to *be* poor.

The question then becomes one of determining the possibility of a ‘poverty of place’ ineluctably consigning on inhabitants a distinct ‘poverty of persons’. Is it logical to believe, as DeeJay and others do, that an area, a location, a place can in and of itself, be so privative as to render all its constituents impoverished? And what is the nature of this ‘poverty’? These are not questions that can be answered here. What has been identified however, is an inexorable linkage between the existential and the experiential, which renders the official concept of poverty invalid to the lives of many to the extent that the construct is devoid of resonance with spatiality. This interconnection is evident firstly, in the determining effect of spaces on the possibilities of individual action and life outcomes (*i.e.* human existence is in part spatially determined), and secondly, in the fact that spaces are themselves discursively *produced* in a Lefebvrian sense (*i.e.* human ‘activity’/experience ‘produces’ space) (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, it is not only individuals and groups who invest places with meaning through conceptual ‘work’ or through ‘structures of feeling’. Inhabited spaces also equally ‘work’ upon resident individuals, conferring by the right of provenance, certain entitlements or certain penalties, and vitally, certain presumed characteristics: to *be* from Windsor is to *be* a *squatter*. The Windsor resident, through representations of space, symbolically embodies illegitimacy and the worst deprivations of the locality, even though residents have varying levels of access to material resources. This collective symbolic dispossession is extremely powerful in its ability to naturalise or to *orient* approaches to places.

### 6.4.2 The *Orienting* Force of Representations

Said (2003:54) in his lauded disquisition on *Orientalism*, has proposed that “geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic and cultural ones in expected ways”. His work demonstrated how certain places came to acquire an “emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here”. Therefore, much of what we know about space, whether Windsor or elsewhere, “is poetic – made up” (Said, 2003:55). The insights drawn from what Said saw as *imaginative geography*, may assist in understanding the relations of deprivation that engulf the ‘squatter community’ being examined in this research. In analysing the symbolic realm Windsor occupies, a deliberate play on Said’s concept of ‘orientalism’ has been made through the use of the terms ‘orienting’ or ‘orientation’ and these can be used to refer to processes (both discourses and actions) which shape and move thought in particular directions. Specifically, the terms become commentaries on the now organic demarcation and denunciation of Windsor as not only a place of excessive ‘material deprivation’, but a receptacle for ‘social depravation’. In St. Ann’s Bay, for example, the owner of the main supermarket patronised by the community is noted to have described Windsor as: “a place full of thief, teenage pregnancy, covetous and badmind people. He say, God blight the place, that’s why it have so much dirty gully and full of so much disease” (Orville, Interview Transcript #36). These kinds of statements which vividly depict the debauched and mephitic imagery built up of Windsor can be elicited with ease from businesspersons and employees of various other organisations that surround and serve the community.

Even those who would eschew the application of the label ‘poverty’ to their community are forced to recognise that Windsor rests within a deplored category of thought. One of the founders of the

Windsor Youth Club, Mack, when asked whether or not the community was poor seemed to immediately resist what the label represented:

**Interviewer:** Alright, in terms of the community, what you think? You think it is a poor one?

**Mack:** In terms of the community itself?

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Mack:** We have things in the community. That we can live off and reap off. Is not really poor, 'cause we have the Mineral 'round here that you know. We can do a lot of things in the community. See 'cause up there, the river is there, that we know we can camp out on the river. Get two of us and camp out and those little things. So you wouldn't really call the community a poor community, in a sense (Interview Transcript #13).

Later on when asked about the development of the community, there was a clear demonstration of how representations matter materially for those living and working in stigmatised areas:

**Interviewer:** In terms of development and making things better then, where you see the community going?

**Mack:** We want to develop the community, that mean if individuals come inside the community and say: "alright, trust me, I love what going on in the community, I see the improvement in it". Then we know where we stand. But we not even getting that from nobody at all!

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Mack:** 'Cause we squatting, we have to do every little thing, whatsoever we need. And when it come to politician now, everybody come through, them drive through and them see the condition what we living in and from them win – [pause] – nobody at all. Them don't even come back and say: "that look good". Them know that we have a club even if they visit with something or just come and say something, we would know. Nobody at all! So we doing our thing that we can do right now (Interview Transcript #13).

The interesting thing here is that like many others spoken to throughout the fieldwork process, there was a reluctance to define the community as *poor*. Mack and others are comfortable with all or most of the residents being identified as poor, but the classification of the community as an



'impoverished area' is often resisted (although just as frequently the 'poverty of place' is proposed). The series of negative stigmas attached to 'poor places' means that there is a constant struggle (in cases of resistance to the label) to disassociate the locality from demeaning imaginaries. However, because these imaginaries are extant in the minds and actions of many, both within and outside Windsor, it is usually a futile undertaking. This is clear from Mack's frustration at the inability to gain recognition for any work being done or improvements made in the community. The formation of the youth club, which should have been a step in that direction, has proven to be wholly ineffective in dislodging the deeply entrenched negative *orientation* or *orienting* of Windsor.

Mack presciently recognises that it is in the conceived space – the space where a politician, a journalist or a social worker says: "I see improvement in it" – as much as in the actual material betterment of the area, that the community will shed its pariah status. He expresses an acute disappointment: "we want them to come here and look at what we are doing, but none of them don't care" (Interview Transcript #13). In his lamentation, Mack appeals to a particular relation of power where experts and politicians are able to "constitute the given by stating it, to act upon the world by acting upon the representation of the world" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:148). The "illocutionary force" of the technocrats who speak and act disparagingly toward the community are able to durably implant orientations because both the authority of professionalism and the materially significant policy vehicles are mobilised behind power. Thus, acting on and confirming the 'imaginative geography' applied to Windsor, sacralises and "thingifies" the stigma in such a way that it becomes a fixed orientation, an undisputable truth. The discursive construction of marginality is therefore made possible when this "relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational

and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people” (Lukacs quoted in Taussig, 1980:3).

Mack and many other residents who try to engineer ‘progress’ for their community are caught within relations of domination which obstruct their efforts to change the bellicose representation and the symbolic butchering of Windsor. As such they must do battle with the natural order of things as inscribed on their community by individual poverty and the designation of the area as a poor place. It was pointed out in introducing the community,<sup>54</sup> that when academics, politicians and journalists deploy representations of poverty “rarely do they suggest by their rhetoric that one can lead a meaningful, contented, and fulfilled life if one *is* poor” (Hooks, 1994:169). Full personhood will never be granted to those caught within this relational and representational cataclysm. The evidence outlined in the paragraphs above supports Brodber (1975:1) who in her work argued that those seeking help were not “naked” and they possess their own methods of responding to problems. Additionally, it demonstrates that there is a need to shift analysis away from an exclusively “deficit view of poverty” and begin to consider the questions: “What do people have? What are they able to do with that they have? How do they think about what they have and what they can do?” (McGregor, 2004:346).

The next section explores in further detail, some of the political and social consequences of living in marginality as an illustration of spatial relations that are often ignored even though they have enormous implications for how people experience poverty.

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 4, page 104 104.

## 6.5. “These Things Is Our Only Rights”: The Politics of Claim-Making, Poverty and Social Death in Windsor

### Field Diary Entry: ‘Riot at Black party’s Office’

**Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2008**

The minute I arrived this afternoon I knew something was wrong. No one was standing by the fence of the Windsor Girls’ Home, Dave’s recently opened corner shop was closed, and about eight youths and ten older members of the community were in a circle and engaged in an intense discussion. I had never seen anything like it and wasn’t sure if I could interrupt but as I exited the car, I was invited over by Pursey.

Dave and two others had just been released from St. Ann’s Bay lock up where they had spent about four hours and were talking about their experiences. When they finished I asked what caused their incarceration. Pursey who sees himself as the natural leader of the pack took the lead: “The Black Party<sup>55</sup> doing construction work down at their office and they hire some man that is not even from Bay. I don’t know where they come from. They can’t do that. How I never see not even one of them when we running up and down election day?” The men chimed in with different aspersions and expletives against the Black Party. Pursey continued: “So we soldier it down there, cause we can’t stand for that. Every man have their cutlass and thing”. At this point Dave chimed in to make sure that the last point didn’t go unqualified: “Kurt we never go down there for no war but you can’t be like a weak fence when you standing up for your rights”.

Dave took over telling the story: “When we reach down there, we see whole heap of man not doing no work, them sitting down, so we start call out for Mr. John and make everybody know that this not right. Same-time a little fool stand up and put him hand on him side like him have gun. So I tell him: ‘youth easy yourself is not your business, we come to Mr. John’. I warn him to just easy. Him going to tell me that him will shoot me and we must leave now”. There was laughter all round before Dave resumed: “So I say: ‘Okay, you is badman?’ and I tell him to shoot me. Him shouting off him face, so I just start to beat him. More of them rush on and so we start beat them. We deal with them properly and most of them run”. There was laughter again, but unable to believe what I was hearing, I asked: “So what if him did pull gun and shoot you?” To which Dave replied: “The boy is a

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<sup>55</sup> I have anonymised references to political parties.

idiot. But him not that fool. Him know him can't do nothing. None of them can't shoot Windsor man. You mad?" Seeing my bemusement, he started talking through laughter: "Even when the police come I still putting lick on that idiot one. Police have to beg for him and the other two that Steve and Mike was beating. They wait till we finish and then them carry we over the station to take a little cool off". Again the whole group broke out into laughter and celebration.

At this point I got my first taste of how the political machinery worked in Windsor. Pursey explained that the police arrested Dave and the two other men who were actively beating the workers. The rest of the Windsor men went home and Pursey went to work on a resolution. He met with the political representative, Mr. John and they went to the police station together. The politician explained that the fracas was a "misunderstanding" that was his fault and it was agreed that the men would have to stay in jail for the day. However, Dave and the others were released after about 3 hours because Pursey got a favour from his police "brethren".

Mr. John apologised to Pursey and told him that all the Windsor men who wanted work should come to the site in the morning. There were satisfying victories on all fronts.

Later Pursey explained to me: "Listen Kurt, we vote for them, is a whole heap of work to do around election time. Days and nights, they know that they can't give man from some other place our work. We have to defend that or else we can't eat. Everybody know, even the police know that we not wrong, because these things is our only rights". I asked: "So you don't think violence going to make people look down on you even worse?" His response was: "Brethren, we can never change how they look on we, that set long time. But if we just let it slide without a fight, you tell me when we going to ever get anything out of this system?" I had no answer.

This incident brings to the fore a number of interesting issues concerning this research including violence, employment, the intricacies of political representation, and the ambiguous role of the police in marginalised communities. Indeed, a whole host of complex relations were bound up and played out in that encounter. However, the point that reverberated most widely was Pursey's comment: "these things is our only rights". The justification for the altercation was tightly wrapped within a rights discourse and the urgency was driven home with a poverty claim: "we have to defend it or else we can't eat". An interrogation of this emotive appeal reveals a complicated 'reality' underlying the events of that morning. Firstly, the construction work could not be seen as

absolutely necessary to the survival of the Windsor men who protested, since they had no idea about it before the refurbishment started, it was short term (only lasted a few days) and there would be no telling when in future such 'guaranteed' work opportunities would arise. Immediate access to income was not the key issue here. A completely different cluster of poverty relations allowed this incident to be framed and represented within an entitlement repertory. Before exploring those issues, it is important to contextualise what had occurred.

Tilly's (2000) work on *spaces of contention* is instructive in understanding the events described in the paragraphs above. He delineated five reasons for the centrality of space in contentious politics (2000:138-139). Three are noteworthy in the context of this research and have been conscripted into the discussion on aspects of the Windsor incident:

- (i) Contention takes place within humanly occupied space, often including the built environment. It is not only time-distance costs that are relevant, but also the fact that spatial configurations present both opportunities and constraints to participants in public claim making. On the morning of the incident, an army of around 15 men 'soldiered' their way to the Black Party's constituency office. Due to the proximity of their community to the office they could 'march' there with ease and with no need to arrange costly transportation.
- (ii) Governments always play some part in contentious politics. They usually organise at least some of their power around places and spatial routines. Hence, contentious politics often challenge or disrupt governmental activity, and thereby incite governmental intervention. The strategic disruption of this activity impelled two forms of interventions. Firstly, from the police who restored public order and stopped the disruption of planned works and secondly, from an elected 'representative' who recognised the legitimacy of the grievance.

- (iii) Routine political life endows different places and spatial routines with symbolic significance, which is then available for adoption, parody, or transmutation by participants in transgressive politics. The violent demonstration of anger at the office was organised as a spectacle to embarrass the politician who 'disrespected' the community by employing outsiders in the refurbishment. The Jamaican political culture accommodates and promotes the use of violence to secure certain types of advantages from the state and its agents (Gray, 2004).

In light of Tilly's propositions that aggrieved groups attempt to discover and exploit "openings in whatever web of control authorities lay down" (2000:152) and that they usually "employ well established means of public claim making" (2000:138), it may be argued that the reaction of the Windsor men associated with the Black Party was anticipatable. There are three questions of interest here: since this exact cohort of Windsor residents was most at odds with 'society' and authority, why were their 'rights' so quickly recognised and honoured by politicians and the police? What exact mechanism or 'opening' was being exploited with the claims of poverty? The final issue that is vital to the relations of deprivation being discussed is: how does this 'opening' enable or constrain in other spheres of life, that is, how is it otherwise manifested? The first two of these questions are looked at below while the third is examined in the next sub-section.

Despite the posturing and routines, all the parties involved knew that a political game was afoot and this allowed for restraint on all sides. Perhaps the most significant factor in securing the quick release of Dave and the other men who were arrested was the fact that though they boasted about "beating" the outsiders, apparently, no one was seriously harmed. This is interesting since the weapons used in the assaults were machetes and iron bars. It is clear that deliberate thought guided most of the actions of that day and 'rights' were honoured because the protest occurred within set customary parameters. Thus, even though one of the outside workers supposedly had

a gun, he 'knew' he couldn't shoot any of the Windsor antagonists; the Windsor men responded by not inflicting any seriously threatening blows with their weapons and in turn the police, who are renown for their brutality to people from Windsor, were very relaxed about the whole situation. In fact, if Dave is to be believed, the police waited until the altercation had ended before making arrests. On the part of the politician, the bargaining that took place on behalf of the detained men and the subsequent hiring of those who took part, demonstrates the sordid nature of political affairs in Jamaica. These actions confirm Gray's characterisation of the country's political culture as "opportunistic" and "parasitic". He correctly describes it as a system which "incorporates antagonistic norms and practices, several of which are hostile to the ones" the state publicly defends and selectively enforces (Gray, 2004:7).

It appears that as far as was possible, the spectacle put on by Pursey and the Windsor 'army' was designed to command attention but not disrupt the daily activities of those who worked and lived in the environs of St. Ann's Bay. The men marched in an orderly fashion to the Black Party compound, kept their dispute within its boundaries and directed their entreaties specifically to 'their' elected official. It was strictly an internal party matter and not a public demonstration about the lack of employment for the youths or adults of Windsor. In this sense, the forceful demand for the construction jobs on the office was a claim to their 'rightful' share of work within a politics of 'distribution of scarce benefits and spoils' (an oft repeated description of the Jamaican political system). The claims to the 'right to eat a food' must be examined within these fixed political conventions which constrain politicians and binds them to certain 'entitlement arrangements' with those who helped to secure their victory in elections. Politicians are expected (and they almost invariably meet these expectations) to be the main vehicles of "patronage dispensation" which operates at different scales based on the support provided (Price, 2004; cf. Walker, 2008). At the lowest level (which is the place of Windsor in the political stratum) 'community workers' are often

the unemployed who become indispensable to the election efforts by doing numerous essential odd jobs (convincing others to vote through small bribes and organising their communities and friends in voting blocks).<sup>56</sup> In return, they expect to be repaid with political and personal favours including: awarding of labouring jobs when any construction work is being done locally by the elected official (whether governmental or party based); assisting select children from the community with school fees; making political intercessions when residents have legal problems; and intermittently providing small sums of money to 'help' the community.

These 'scarce benefits' are exclusively distributed via the campaigners to persons in the community so that the 'workers' are able to gain respect by showing direct access to the powers that be. The effective execution of this strategy is fundamental to the recruitment of voters in future elections and both politicians and their satellite agents become mutually dependent. Reneging on responsibilities to the 'community workers' within this patronage system is perceived as an unwillingness to allow 'the poor man' to have a share of the considerable spoils that are inevitably generated from success in politics. To those who can rely on little else by way of state patronage this is both disgraceful and unacceptable. This could be inferred from Pursey's statement: "even the police know we not wrong". On the other hand, a form of contestation which blocked the operations of the town and which was aimed at decrying the systematic exclusion of Windsor residents from the labour market might have elicited a different set of responses from both the police and the political representative involved. The politics of scarce benefits on the scale of a community such as that of Windsor does not allow for contestation on important structural issues. There was clearly a calculation of the state's 'threshold' and although they responded with violence to some of the 'outsiders' (who were fellow party 'insiders'), their anger

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<sup>56</sup> In urban areas 'politics work' may include violent and illegal election activities cited by Gray (2004). However, in rural parts of the country it is fundamentally different. It tends to involve laborious efforts (e.g. organising voting blocs) and morally reprehensible activities (e.g. buying votes), but it is usually non-violent.



was controlled so as to remain within the parameters of 'appropriate' behaviour in the local political context. Thus, the form and content of the protest was not random or chaotic, rather it demonstrated an astute consciousness of "the spatial organisation of surveillance, repression, political control and their evasion" (Tilly, 2000:143).

Through both the deployment (the attack on the 'outside' workers) and the legitimisation (the subsequent attitude and actions of the police and political representative) of violence, the principals in this event have confirmed and extended a sort of pseudo-legal precedent which makes any construction works done by the Black Party in St. Ann's Bay an appropriate claim for Windsor residents. If this 'contract' is not upheld, the aggrieved have been tacitly authorised to take violent action (within certain limits) in securing restitution for what is rightfully theirs. These political consuetudes seem beneficial and they appear to be a source of power for the deprived, but they operate under certain conditions and have serious implications for those dominated peoples trapped within them. The statement, "these things is our only rights" sobers enthusiasm for the potential of the poor to partake of and influence the political realm. Instead, it demands that attention be given to the numenic force which so altruistically proffers this assured power to an otherwise oppressed people.

### **6.5.1 Social Power and Social Death: Two Sides of a Single Space**

Gray (1994, 2003, 2004), commenting on the *social power of the urban poor in Jamaica*, excavated long established public opinions about poverty and politics, ensured they were grounded in evidence and then infused them with theoretical substance. He argued that dominated groups in Jamaica have the "capacity to elude power, constrain its effects on them, bargain with it, and adapt it to conform to some of their needs" (2004:3). In this eloquent

description of the social power of the poor, Gray identifies the ability of militant guardians to fashion rivalling power structures, develop localised models of community rallying, carry out seizures of strategic social spaces, and to establish “the dramaturgic and aesthetic bases of a dissident cultural consciousness” (2004:19). He notes that the urban poor are seen to have placed significant limits on the reach of political power and to have shaped the direction of social change. However, Gray acknowledges another side of the much vaunted social power, arguing:

*The very forms of its social power that act as powerful constraints on dominant groups are themselves the basis of subordinate group cannibalism, and self-suppression.* Their social power has altered the dynamics of power relations, but not always in ways that permit the urban poor to unilaterally dictate outcomes to power holders. Paradoxically then, the urban lower class – the most rebellious and feared stratum in postcolonial Jamaica and nemesis of the powerful – finds itself in a checkmated situation anchored in the very marginality that gave them a purchase on power (2004:21, emphasis added).

Since both the location (St. Ann as opposed to Kingston) and the focus (processes of deprivation as opposed to the political system) of this study are radically different from those examined by Gray, it is important to understand and interpret the ‘social power’ expressed by the Windsor men in its own context and with its own dispositions. Consequently, the ways in which this power manifests itself in a less urbanised place needs to be explored. Moving even further away from Gray’s analysis, it is essential to consider its everyday permutations and role in reproducing certain dolorific relations. Specifically, how is it that an invasion of party political space to effect a violent confrontation based on reprehensible politics became construed by Pursey and others as “our only rights”?

There is a need to question the intricacies of political ‘representation’ by reflecting first of all on the ‘opening’ these men were able to enter into so as to exercise their claims. It is possible to

begin the emersion into the political underbelly of social power by following the path mapped out in an interview with one resident:

**Interviewer:** So what you think about the community, you feel that it poor?

**Keeno:** Well you can say poor yes. It could only be that because plenty time we tell the boss that we want the road fix and they not fixing it. Years now they level it off with marl and say by next week or next month they will tar it. Even up to now we can't see nothing.

**Interviewer:** Nothing in terms of fixing it properly?

**Keeno:** They talk 'bout change and say things going to fix. Everybody hear what they say. See it, the Prime Minister win now. So I don't understand. They say they going to plan to block the road in Bay 'cause only when we block the road so they will come up here. But some people say don't even bother with it, because it don't make no sense.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Keeno:** Because they don't care 'bout we. The only care they care 'bout we is to throw we in jail. So if we go and block road they going to say: "see it, they is criminal, lock them up" (Interview Transcript #3).

The implication here is that the community must be poor because when politicians make promises to people residing in Windsor, those promises are not kept. In fact, across communities with varying levels of affluence, it is not unusual to hear that residents feel election promises have been broken or that they are being neglected by their members of parliament (Thompson, 2010). Yet, there was something different in Keeno's rationale as projected through relations specific to his community. In most other localities individuals and groups are able to access channels through which to express their grievances with the state. For deprived communities this is often done through media publicised demonstrations. As argued by Johnson (2008:163), the media is a forum which allows poor people to speak and be heard and in this way 'performing protests' in most Jamaican communities has become "poor people press conference". Keeno calls the ability to use this widely accepted form of claim making into question, noting that it may be a futile exercise and citing the fear that it would be an excuse for people to say: "see it, they is criminal,

lock them up". Windsor's relationship to official power is a precarious one which often acts to preclude certain types of actions that would be appropriate for other more respected localities. The politics of uncertainty and despair permeates the rights discourse as they relate to wider structural claims.

In his historical perspective on self-help in Jamaica, Eyre (1997) demonstrated the opportunistic oscillation in the political representation of 'squatters'. He documented a situation on the Jamaican North Coast where "certain politicians encouraged – even personally led – capturers to invade" and construct homes on private land. Having obtained a court order, the owner evicted the residents and had their dwellings demolished by the police. In response, the government decried the evictions as "immoral and unjust" and summarily dismissed the members of the security forces involved in the incident. As the legal implications of their actions became obvious and "the realities began to dawn", the dismissed policemen were all fully reinstated and exonerated of all wrongdoing. What was perhaps most significant in this encounter however, was the public declaration by a senior government minister that squatting was "immoral and antisocial" (Eyre, 1997:92-94). This was a complete reversal, since members of this party had encouraged the squatting and promoted the "right" of the landless to occupy 'idle' properties. For those living in 'unplanned' settlements, political representation is almost entirely contingent on political expedience. There is a perspective held by a significant proportion of the Windsor community that they are structurally unable to access the same level of rights as other areas (even other equally informal and poor places). This is due to an intense sense of political and social alienation amounting to what may be described as *social death*.

Derrida (1982b:294) described representation as bearing “an essential relation to a *double body*” wherein the motives of the represented are *incorporated* through the words and deeds of the envoy. As such political representatives “speak not only in favour of those whom they represent but also very often in their place” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:147). The question at issue here is: What occurs when there is no ontological grounding for the emissary because the ‘represented’ cannot be legitimately ‘recognised’ since they are not ‘policed’ by the state? ‘Policing’ here takes on Foucault’s (1988:154) usage of the concept which designates it as a field concerned with “man’s coexistence in a territory, their relationships to property, what they produce, what is exchanged in the market, and so on”. Sewell (2001:68) seems to concur in his contention that “not all state policing is carried out by police forces. The military, the tax authorities, and various branches of the bureaucracy also engage in policing in this sense. To be fully effective the state’s policing must cover the entire space of the territory”. With this in mind, the possibility of politically *embodying* the Windsor community through the machinery of state is vitiated by the ‘illegitimate’ relationship its inhabitants have to the land they occupy. While it must be noted that the residents may otherwise be ‘represented’ in politics, for instance through their employment (*e.g.* unions) or through social organisations (*e.g.* gender based NGOs or religious groups), as a community, their relation to power structures is extremely narrow. It consists in securing party political favours and even this is unstable and always in jeopardy of being terminated.

In a vatic move, Larry, a ‘hustler’, depicted political ‘recognition’ as essential in accessing ‘rights’ and pointed to land legitimisation as having a key role in this process:

**Interviewer:** What you think is good ‘bout the community?

**Larry:** Well what I think good 'bout this community is that we come together in this youth club so we can get recognise by the MP. 'Cause this community is not recognise. Here is capture land, matter of fact they say is capture land. See it?

**Interviewer:** Yes, yes

**Larry:** They going to say a lot of thief and gunman in the community. So is those things we want to get rid of, to get good people can come in, like yourself and your friend. And can enjoy yourself, 'cause we have nice ball ground around here and thing like that. So what I want for the community is that the land can sell and government can give who can afford to buy the land, time to save their money (Interview Transcript #18).

Larry's points here echo Lefebvre's proposition that "the state and each of its constituent institutions call for spaces – but spaces which they can organise according to their specific requirements" (1991:85). As a result, it is possible to ask whether the residents of Windsor can/should, within this political context, be due the same rights as other Jamaican citizens. The very fact that this question may hold any value in principle or in practice at once problematises the notion of citizenship. Marshall (1992:18) outlined, in his classic interrogation of the issue, that citizenship "is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed". If this definition is to be accepted then it is worthwhile to consider whether these Windsor 'squatters' are indeed 'Jamaicans'. This is not necessarily a question of whether the land they occupy should be automatically granted the same status as legally owned property. Rather, the issue is, once 'representation' has been made to/through any 'social body' are they not then endowed with fixed patterns of recourse to claim those representations as 'rights'? The perceived inability of the residents of Windsor to publicly demonstrate (as other groups frequently do) for fear of state repression reflects the fact that the community has not been legitimately embodied as a 'representable' social being. This is a status that Windsor shares with many other squatter settlements. Referring to one of the most notorious squatter areas in Jamaica, Riverton City, Eyre (1997:85) notes that: "officially, the settlement and its almost 2000 residents simply do not exist.

Significantly, even the map of the political constituency published by the Statistical Institute of Jamaica gives no inkling of its whereabouts". Communities constituted by such relations are effectively *dead*; they are non-entities resigned to feed from the scrap heaps of the political system.

The social immolation of Windsor extends into other relations and becomes almost complete. Johnson (2008:163) posits that "popular protest, as broadcast by the news media, is often the only means through which political representatives and other bureaucrats are alerted to the concerns of their constituents". Wedded to this is the fact that the media "draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, 'definitions of the situation' from the wider socio-cultural and political system of which they are a part" allowing for the determination that the "audience is both source and the receiver of the television message" (Hall, 1973:3). Taking both propositions into account it becomes clear that there is a complex and 'mutually constitutive' relationship between the media and protesters. This means the 'performance of protest' aimed at motivating politicians to address the fundamental concerns of communities is likely to be successful only to the extent that it tugs at and appeals to the social conscience of the national audience thereby embarrassing and forcing representatives into action. Informal settlements are not equally empowered in these relations.

Despite the fact that informal communities may be able to access the media platform, some within the national media have consistently projected an image of squatters as marauding vermin ripping across the island and taking with them crime, desolation and moral nihilism. Articles with lurid titles, such as *Squatters Take Over* (Dorman, 1990), *Squatter Epidemic* (Blair, 2006), *Squatter Siege* (Manning, 2006), or *The Cancer of Squatting Spreads* (Ennis, 2009), evoke fears

and implant an imagery of degeneracy. It is understandable then, that Windsor residents perceive themselves as severely debilitated in their ability to arouse public sympathies. On the contrary, it is believed by many that: “their philosophy is that if you come from Windsor, you are a thief, you are a robber, you are capable of doing anything. So they always have eyes on you” (Prento, Interview Transcript #21).

Even in the most severe crises there exists an element of authorial rhigosis in the treatment of ‘squatters’. This was exemplified in a situation where there was “no doubt” that the inhabitants of Old Harbour, an informal settlement in Kingston, were facing serious health risks from the asbestos that had been used in constructing their homes. Journalist, Morris Cargill, instead of treating the health crisis as a tragedy, viewed it as an opportunity to once and for all remove the human detritus from the landscape. He notes:

One suggestion made is that the squatters should be relocated somewhere on a temporary basis, while the asbestos is removed and the ground covered with asphalt. Presumably, the squatters could then return. But while this would solve the health problem, it would not solve the squatting problem (Cargill, 1999).

With regard to the government’s responsibilities to that community, Cargill explains: “the squatters had squatted illegally and I can’t see that the state has any obligation to provide them with housing elsewhere. Having squatted, the squatters would now be well advised to unsquat” (Cargill, 1999). The implication here is that if these people had not been squatters, they might have had recourse to some sort of state re-housing programme. Thus, only legal dwellers have the ‘right’ to claim shelter, temporary or permanent, and even when there are potentially deadly health emergencies ‘squatters’ are not due state aid – they have no entitlements. In this perspective, illegal settlers exist in a deontological chasm and are expected to “unsquat” and dissipate into oblivion. Windsor sits within a similar storm of toxic malice and this coupled with the



fear of suppression prevents its residents making claims to 'rights' as part of a community of communities – as a viable, if 'unplanned' social entity within the Jamaican society.

### **6.5.2 The Different Faces of Collective Social Death**

According to Bourdieu, a person's status or utility in social space is expressed in the site of the physical spaces occupied by that agent as well as the agent's positioning within those spaces. As such, "anyone said to be 'without home or hearth' or homeless is virtually without a social existence" (1999a:124). Similarly, communities inhabited by individuals with illicit forms of tenure are incapable of full 'incorporation' as legitimate social entities. Their 'representation' is always only partial, if at all, and their social worth is contingent on public mood and political expedience. The parasitic nature of the Jamaican state provides a role for these localities, but it is usually based on inimical relations of dependence on opportunistic power structures (Gray, 2004). Patterson's (1982) concept of *social death* has been extrapolated from its concern with slavery and employed here to explain the deleterious relations inveterate within the processes of deprivation which surround the political representation of certain durably marginalised poor places.

Because it is here deemed insufficient to rest on Bourdieu's proposition that homelessness designates a condition of existential vacuity, it becomes imperative to explore even further the relations which constitute such conditions, particularly with regard to communities. Patterson's work is indispensable to this enterprise. He argues that "the slave, however recruited," much like the 'unplanned' community, "ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" (1982:5). An important qualification should be made at this point, as it relates to the subject of concern. The insights being adapted from Patterson's study do not refer to individuals but to the

Windsor community and the possibilities for its socio-political *embodiment*. With this in mind, three aspects of social death are examined in respect of their analytical consonance with the collective experiences of those who inhabit the locality of Windsor.

#### **6.5.2.1 Institutionalising Illegitimacy**

Firstly, social death in the context of slavery did not mean ceasing to exist. Archetypically, it was a substitute for a physical death sentence where the insider who had fallen “ceased to belong and had been expelled from normal participation in community because of a failure to meet certain minimal legal or socioeconomic norms of behaviour” (1982:41). There are very few occasions where it may be said that Windsor as a community shares equal societal membership based on any sense of “loyalty to a civilisation which is a common possession” (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992:24). Indeed, the perception of the residents on how Windsor is viewed is frequently quite the opposite: “all the other communities from across the board have nothing to do with the youths from here. Right through St. Ann’s Bay people have it to say, ‘you see that place, it should wipe off the map’” (Purse, Interview #12). Referring specifically to Windsor as well as two other informal settlements in St. Ann’s Bay, social commentator, James Walsh writes:

The problem in respect to the ill-treatment of the squatters is compounded by the inequity of giving them preferential access to land. This privileges them over other landless persons who choose to abide by the law and obtain legal tenure for whatever dwelling place they occupied. The practice of rewarding those who transgress the law more than those who abide by it cannot be conducive to the maintenance of the rule of law (Walsh, 1998).

The state’s resolution to the dilemma about the manner in which to treat those who occupy land informally is to impose a virtual interlocutory injunction on their full participation in the society. In this way, action is suspended until exigent circumstances demand that a decision be taken to either forcibly evict the inhabitants or implement measures to formalise their tenure. The

problem, as expressed by Walsh, is that by giving 'preferential access' to land the government will be rewarding 'transgressors' and placing their interests before 'law abiding' citizens. This is an objection rooted in something other than concern for those who have not squatted, but are in need of housing. As Walsh (1998) in his article admits, for the majority of individuals living in Windsor informally, "squatting is the response which they find most practicable at the time due to the housing scarcity". That many of those who are able to afford to live elsewhere would not choose to live in Windsor was made clear in an interview with one resident, who, for a short time became interviewer to make that point:

**Interviewer:** What would you say it's like living here?

**Auntie Nez:** The biggest – [pause] – I don't even have nothing to talk 'bout this community, more than I just want to leave out of this community

**Interviewer:** So you don't like the community?

**Auntie Nez:** Yeah, I just want leave this community. This community is not for me. You would want to live in Windsor [laugh]?

**Interviewer:** Huh [laugh]?

**Auntie Nez:** You would want to live in Windsor? Talk the truth that God love. You would live in this place? You see how it stay, the kids can't even walk when it get dark or they drop in a gully. Nothing not here for nobody. Tell me, you would want to live in this place?

**Interviewer:** Well, maybe not if I could live somewhere else

**Auntie Nez:** No I don't mean if you have to live here. No what I am asking is you inside yourself, if you would want to ever, ever live in Windsor?

**Interviewer:** No, not really

**Auntie Nez:** Thank you [laugh]

Auntie Nez wanted an unqualified response. In forcing the issue she wanted to make the point that those who can do better do not live in Windsor. It is the residence of choice only for the desperate. Whether or not Auntie Nez's perspective is refutable, the fact is that Windsor is among

the most bedraggled and maligned localities in St. Ann. The area is unlikely to be converted for any other purpose and the mountainous terrain of many parts of it precludes the possibility of a significant official low income governmental housing project. Therefore, to what extent would a process allowing those currently residing there to emerge from the overbearing shadows of informality, disenfranchise the 'law abiding'? How is it an abnegation of their claims of access to low-income housing?

The current state of affairs in St. Ann's Bay is suitable to many since the *de facto* illegitimacy conferred on individuals from Windsor means they are all in effect criminal 'transgressors' not due the respect given to 'proper' law abiding citizens. A regularisation of these 'desperados' would throw into flux the ability to revel in the reviling of this group and dramatically upset the established order of things. As a result of their continuing tenuous and 'unauthorised' relationship to space 'squatters' are doomed to exist in a social vacuum – unable to demand recognition or make authoritative claims to 'rights'. This becomes in a sense an "institutionalised marginality" where socially dead communities such as Windsor remain "in society: a part of it yet, apart from it" (Patterson, 1982:46).

#### **6.5.2.2 Becoming Nothing**

Secondly, Patterson (1982:46) showed social death to be "the ultimate cultural outcome of the loss of natality as well as honour and power". There was for those doomed to this type of existence "at the very least, a secular excommunication" (1982:5) alienating them from ties to remote ancestors and descendants therefore making of them, *genealogical isolates* (1982:331). Important to this relation of domination was the conversion of the human being to "*thingness*" (1982:32). In the case of Windsor there has been a social process of consigning residents to an

inherent *nothingness*. The informality of the inhabitants' relationship to the land is a necessary, but insufficient condition for this outcome. Related to non-legal tenure but distinct from it – since not all informal settlements are viewed with this level of disgust – is Windsor's renowned status as a place with all kinds of criminals. As argued in a previous section of this chapter, there is a pernicious imaginative geography of degeneracy which sustains numerous myths about the community. In the words of one youth: "they have it to say that this community build on thieving and that the most skilful thieves in St. Ann come from this community so the whole of them hate we" (Singer, Interview Transcript #8). Perhaps more worryingly, in discussing how they are perceived by others, a number of youths used dehumanising terms, for example, Michelle: "they say bad *things* always come from Windsor" (Interview Transcript #24); Delano: "they have this stigma that *anything* come from Windsor no good" (Interview Transcript #30); or Preto: "they say *nothing* good can't come from Windsor" (Interview Transcript #21). This alienation from personhood in naming/labelling is in no way benign, since titles are more than means of referring to people or things. Indeed, titles are signals of identity and of "being-in-the-world" as viable and distinct entities. Cassirer recognises naming as the key factor in domination: "the notion that a name and essence bear a necessary relation to each other, that the name does not denote but actually *is* the essence of its object, that the potency of the real thing is contained in the name – that is one of the fundamental assumptions of the mythmaking consciousness itself" (Cassirer quoted in Patterson, 1982:55). The 'nothingness' of Windsor deracinates the sense of 'belonging' that many inhabitants of the locality can have in the society *vis-à-vis* their community.

The privation occasioned by 'nothingness' described above is not singularly symbolic. It contributes to other processes of impoverishment such as structural exclusion from formal employment faced by many from the community. In terms of opportunities it has been claimed: "nothing not there for we, you know daddy. Cause if it was there, then everyday we wouldn't have

to be boxing trash out of hog mouth to survive!” (Pursey, Interview Transcript #12). An experience recounted in an interview with a young man who is now in stable employment brings to the fore these relations:

**Interviewer:** What you think is the greatest difficulty reaching the community now?

**Ryan:** All right basically, many time the youth go out there and they go look for a work and when they go out there and they ask them where they come from – [pause]– You see if they tell them Windsor?

**Interviewer:** What happen?

**Ryan:** They don’t have no work to get. They can forget ‘bout that work.

**Interviewer:** So that ever happen to you yet?

**Ryan:** That reach me one time already of course. When I was going high school, I go out there going to look a summer job. I remember ‘bout four of we go out there, we going to look work at a supermarket in Ochi that we hear was looking for people. When we reach, the brother carry we inside and him tell we ‘bout the job and talk a little bit and then him say: ‘where you guys come from?’ I tell him Windsor. The brother was sitting down, him stand up in front of the whole place and shout out loud: WE DON’T HAVE NO WORK, ALL OF YOU GO HOME! That’s how him say it. For real, that is how they deal with we.

**Interviewer:** So what you guys do?

**Ryan:** Yeah man, we just turn and come out. From the brother tell me that, I don’t even walk and look no more work. I just come straight to my yard. Stay home whole summer (Interview Transcript #11).

In that sequence it was possible to recognise the denial of personhood – *nothingness* in action.

Pursey’s, eidetic commentary on this process shows additional deprivations:

If you look on me like nothing, you not going to get nothing from me. ‘Cause you already have me as nothing. So me just playing the game that you give. The name that you give me, I living up to it. My General, is just so the system set up. So when I come and give you some of the nothing that you call me. You can’t say nothing” (Interview Transcript #12).

In this manner, quite frequently both those who confer the title 'nothing' (and/or act upon it) and those who are subject to the label (and its effects) may become victims. Society does not gain from relegating communities (or individuals) into social non-existence. Banishment by social death, because it is always incomplete, can only lead to anomie and adversarial forms of interaction.

### 6.5.2.3 Succumbing to Parasitism

The third aspect of social death of import here is that of parasitism. Patterson through the comparative work across slaveholding societies showed that slavery and its agnate social death was not a pardon from a death sentence, "it was particularly, a conditional commutation. The execution was suspended as long as the slave acquiesced in his powerlessness". What was established then, was a relation of domination where "the slave had no socially recognised existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson" (Patterson, 1982:5). However within the conceptual framework of parasitism "the dominator in the process of dominating and making another individual dependent, also makes himself (the dominator) dependent". This paradox, according to Patterson (1982:336), may be expressed without taking the argument to its limits as parasitism is a continuum ranging from near *true mutualism* (minor dependence) to near *total parasitism* (complete dependence).

In the conversation with Pursey after the incident at the constituency office that served as the impetus for this section, he asked: "if we just let it slide without a fight, you tell me when we going to ever get anything out of this system?" It was noted in the diary that I had no answer to this question (Field Diary Entry: Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2008). There was no response to the question in part because I did not know. Having never before witnessed their direct political interactions, even

if I instinctively thought there were ways for them to formally make claims of their representatives without resorting to violent 'patron-client' demands (or what in Jamaica is referred to as "curry goat politics"), I would not have been able to say what those avenues were. But also, in part, I had no answer because I believed the claim was in some ways valid. From what I had observed of the community (even though there had as yet been little analysis) I could see that there was much validity in their claims to social isolation and persecution. It is perhaps impossible to sort through the historical entanglements so as to identify the causes of the extremity of the communal misery in Windsor and it may be equally implausible to try to comprehend exactly how the 'rights' deficit came to be a part of the sustenance of corrupt politicians. However, it is clear that parasitism feeds off the misery of these people and both are now indispensable aspects of the political machinery (for both the major political parties). The work done for the parties during elections creates a mutual dependence. However, payments usually do not arrive by way of formal recognition, they do not involve significant investments in 'human development', nor do they take the form of efforts to improve local physical infrastructure. Rather, compensation is ordinarily disbursed through piecemeal efforts and intermittent morsels – a design which seems explicitly intended to keep residents in *Lethe*. For Windsor, this relationship not only exploits vote winning 'labour', but avoids spurring the ire of those in society opposed to the granting of formality which may be seen as 'privileging' illegitimates and thereby sanctioning the outlawry of the squatter. Holding the citizenry rights and social existence of a group of people in indefinite abeyance is a virulent relation of deprivation that murderously hacks away at Jamaican polity.

#### **6.5.2.4 Postscript on Social Death**

Social death has been used here to provide a concept through which to understand an impoverishing relationship that is at once spatial, political, historical and economic. Poverty research to date has focused on immediately observable characteristics and many discuss the



insecurity, hopelessness and fear expressed by 'the poor' who inhabit informal settlements (Levy, 1996; Moser & Holland, 1997). Consequently, there is little exploration of the deprivations attached to the social meanings which are thrust upon them and how these meanings become a part of daily existence and so aid in producing outcomes that may be defined as poverty. For some, that 'the poor' fight for political scraps or kill each other for politicians is seen as a natural part of what 'hungry' and violent scoundrels do to survive, while more sympathetic analyses simply blame the politicians. Here an attempt has been made to shift the focus to specific relations of domination emerging from society as a whole which maintain various deprivations by failing to ensure that the social imaginary does not control the social conscience. Insofar as the media, academia and the 'public' are creative principals in the Jamaican polity, they are all culpable in these relations. Collectively they allow for the impossibility of the representational embodiment (or only a contingent embodiment) of some communities because the residents have an informal relationship to the places they inhabit.

Additionally, the society or significant sections of it, initiates an internecine privation by durably inscribing *nothingness* on certain groups and communities. This in turn enables the deploying of a host of other extractive relations including devastating acts of structural violence. Labelling of any sort is dangerous but the imaginative geography which stains the residents of informal settlements incapacitates multiple aspects of individual livelihoods. In fact, the majority of inhabitants in many informal settlements (certainly the majority in Windsor) do not engage in the machinations (political or otherwise) that exacerbate their community's exclusion from participation in society, but they are nevertheless victims, who must bear the heavy burdens of these processes. When Pursey justified the violent outburst with the claim: "*these things is our only rights*", that statement held within it, a tacit acknowledgement of the social death of his community. This actualisation of *circular social cannibalism* can only be to the detriment of the

Windsor residents, the politicians, the surrounding communities and the society in general, yet it continues *in perpetuum*.

## 6.6. Conclusion

There has been a recent wave of efforts to characterise poverty as multidimensional and to cauterise the malignant research suppurations congenital to an absolute definition with qualitative methods. Yet, there remains ever intransigent, a conceptual predilection to abstract poverty and the poor from their connection to social relations and ground them instead in certain universal indicators or conditions of lack. The previous chapter dealt extensively with the methodological inadequacies of these models and showed how the polysemous nature of relations of deprivation demanded more open and reflexive approaches. Here the focus has been on certain spatial relations, how they are constitutive of both symbolic and material extractions and finally, how they conspire to dispossess through the sanguinary regime of extreme marginality.

If this type of analyses is brought to bear introspectively on the empires of thought which dominate modern Caribbean capitalism and which structure practices within it, then, there may be profound implications not only in terms of strengthening the voices of the oppressed, but also in reconstituting their place in the natural order of things. This would demand a brave step into the unknown and therefore many social scientists and policymakers, fearful of the uncertain, may be content with the oneiric abstraction that determines their flawed approach to the materially and symbolically deprived. The fact remains that after decades of *investment in poverty* there is an unavoidable recognition that too much extreme deprivation exists in too many countries in the

Caribbean region and the wheel continues to turn. The poverty line is supplemented by capability indicators, which have themselves been bolstered by participatory methods. Myriad innovations accompany each without full reflection on social relations because the 'phantom-objectivity' of poverty has largely vanquished innovative thinking.

The intellectual obduracy alluded to above, sustains the fallacy Green and Hulme commented on where current approaches are focused on what in actual fact, is not 'poverty', but "the effects of the social relations that produce it" (2005:869). Lévi-Strauss is noted to have said, "it is not people who tell myths, but myths who tell themselves through people" (Lévi-Strauss quoted in Pigg, 1996:175). Therefore, despite the manoeuvring and the strategic fortifications which naturalise processes of pooring, when people's lives and livelihood strategies are examined closely, the façade of 'condition' tends to evaporate which makes it possible for the social relations of deprivation to be revealed. In this research, this ephemeral integument dissipated under the weight of spatiality.

There was first a demonstration of the fact that the concept of poverty was vacuous in constructing the poor as a sort of *homo pauperis* – an entity entirely without provenance and thus devoid of resonance to the lives of people who exist temporally and spatially. Secondly, the analysis focused on the way in which 'poverty of place' can impose extractive processes which deprive individuals both symbolically and materially. These processes take the form of both 'representations of space' and a negative 'orienting of places' and they act to deracinate or decimate aspirations and advancements that can exist even alongside severe relations of deprivation. Finally, the chapter explored one aspect of the collective misery in space by examining how extreme marginality is able to produce *social death*. Because social death is

never complete, those who share this fate may place limited constraints on power through spatial competencies. However, these 'openings' that are available for exploitation, only reflect the catastrophic 'checkmated' position from which many suffering collectives must struggle.

Bell Hooks in her attempt to choose *the margin as a space of radical openness*, eloquently expressed the fact that in 'choosing the margin' she was "not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as *pure*" (1991:151). Instead, she sought to find creativity and hope even among the devastated rubble left behind by the forces of capitalism and modernity. This chapter began by outlining Erna Brodber's bold attempt in the 1970's to identify within the (physical and social) deprivation of the *yard space*, "problem solving agencies" and tools which could be employed in constructing an approach to those in need of assistance. Despite the strengths of those arguments, the prevailing trend has been to denude relations of impoverishment and damn the impoverished into abstraction. The colonisation of the possibilities of thought by conventional approaches to poverty has meant that this research has been forced to do battle with conceptual inertia within a field that is dynamic and complex. Yet, in this contestation it has been possible to prise open the margins and critically engage with some hidden symbolic and material sites of privation (as conferred by space). What is being defined as poverty by the dominant is not fixed; it operates without rules, meanders outside frameworks and skips fleetingly across the boundaries artificially erected by academic and policy desiderata. It finds its home spatially and more generally in the much avoided arena of social relations.

## **CHAPTER 7**

**An Autophotographic Journey into Ways of Seeing and  
Experiencing Everyday Suffering: Individual Theories and  
the Minutia of Impoverishment in Windsor**

## 7.1. Introduction

Thus far, various configurations of the 'perception of poverty' have been problematised and spatiality has been revealed as a site for, as well as a determined and determining influence upon relations of deprivation. The focus to this point has been on the more or less explicit structures of domination that replete the poverty debate. This chapter changes direction by opening up discussions on the ways people view living in their community, in search of those usually unnoticed pillars of everyday experience upon which any practical notion of poverty would necessarily rest. It finds justification for the deviation in the fact that investigations of impoverishment, like many other areas of social science research, run the risk of overlooking the more mundane constraints on the lives of the dominated groups and of overstating the triumph of structures of domination and other visible (and disguised) relations of power (Tagg, 1988:7). But what kind of everyday social meaning could be given to a poverty construct? Even though the question, "what *is* poverty?" has been investigated both from participants perspectives and as a dimension of dominant discourses, other perhaps equally pertinent inquiries have not been directly critically engaged in the analyses presented here. This includes the enigma: what does experiencing poverty *feel like*? One possible response comes from an exchange with a young man about the circumstances surrounding his dismissal from employment:

**Interviewer:** So when they fire you?

**Singer:** Only about day before yesterday.

**Interviewer:** What happen?

**Singer:** Boy is just their thing that. They tell me that's how they have to run it. They say because I working there for about 5 months now, they say that's it for me.

**Interviewer:** What you mean? Why?

**Singer:** Is like they used to have a girl there that they fire because she said she not lifting up the heavy boxes and those things. But when they drop her like that, they have to pay her a whole heap a thousands because she carry in the law, because she working there for more than six months. So because of that, they not keeping nobody longer than five months. As it hit that time you gone. A brethren did tell me 'bout it, but I was praying they wouldn't fire me, so I work extra, extra hard. Everyday I just wishing they wouldn't do it, but it come anyway. You know how long I search before I get that a job?

**Interviewer:** So what that mean for you then, what is the worst thing 'bout it?

**Singer:** The worst thing? Boy, that can't explain. When they send me home I just take my time and walk come up, the only thing in my mind is my mother and me start see the worry on her face when I tell her. She did proud how I have a job and could help her out sometimes. The little that we used to have couldn't hardly stretch, much-less now. I walking up the road and see the house and to how it hurt me, I just stop and sit down right over there and just start to think how the house don't finish yet from when we working on it and now like how I don't have nothing to do that only make things worse. I start walk go home again and just stare on how the road mash up and it won't stop mash up my shoes, but it worse now 'cause I don't have no job to buy no more. Yeah, that was a horrible day, it can't explain. Too much things worse 'bout how they deal with me, but the way I did feel was worserah [much more than worst] (Interview Transcript, #8).

There are a number of identifiable impoverishing effects in Singer's description of the aftermath of his dismissal in terms of what the loss of income would mean for his life. He was, by being unemployed, no longer a contributor and had instead become a burden on his mother. Also, their home which was under construction and barely making progress would now be imperilled by an additional cost (at least for as long as he was without work). Most profound in this description was on the one hand, the inexplicability of the 'feelings' that tore away at him as he pondered the consequences of being unemployed and on the other hand, the eidetic and meticulous detailing of the stimuli which gave purchase to those unutterable feelings (his mother's reaction, the unfinished house, the damaged punishing road and torn shoes). The recollection of the minutia of the occasion (*e.g.* walking on the "mash up" road and looking at the "mash up" shoes) brought a

certain texture and affect to this account that would have been missed if the question had been answered with conventional descriptions of the effects of loss of earnings. The significance of the interaction was not fully grasped at the point of utterance, but the encounter was one of the most moving and memorable exchanges of my fieldwork experience. The sentiments expressed by Singer and the apparent strength (if ineffability) of his feelings could be incorporated into the research as an example of *sufferation*. However, there was a lingering perplexity about the details of the experience; it seemed to have its own locus in a discussion on poverty, though it was not clear where this would be.

Having later discovered something of the place of Singer's remarks, it is possible to belatedly ask: is there some poverty *essence* to be gleaned from an investigation of how individuals *see*, *feel* and *live* their daily struggles and can these details not contribute to an understanding of the content and contours of this kind of social suffering caused by multiple deprivations (whether or not it is specifically referred to as poverty)? Using Singer's dismissal from his job as an example, and placing upon him (for the purposes of this discussion) the inscription of 'poverty', what would be the *nature* of this poverty? The exact essence(s) of impoverishment is an amorphous gestalt from which different theoretical positions cut and feed. Inasmuch as conceiving of poverty exclusively from a personalised (*i.e.* only how participants see or experience it) perspective would impair the ability to generalise and to develop sound theoretical basis from which to create policy, the complete exclusion of the minutia contained in the lived in favour of examinations of 'social conditions', 'social relations' or 'social structures', results in severely debilitated attempts to appreciate the intricacies of this complex and protean phenomenon.



Williams (1975:45), for example, was passionate about the need to account for the struggles of “the men and women who rear the animals, and drive them to the house and kill them and prepare them for meat; who trap the pheasants and partridges and catch the fish; who plant and manure and prune the trees”. Williams’ perspective was that the labour, the hardships and the drudgery did not occur from a “natural order”. As such, it is important to reflect and consider not only the end product (*i.e.* what was done), but the processes (*i.e.* how people do) of survival. Aspects of some of the issues relating to the everyday living of impoverishment reside within the above interview exchange, but they were understood through an evolving process of discovery in the analysis of the autophotographic exercise to be described in this chapter.

An attempt is made here to deliberate on the experiential banalities against which relations of deprivation and their effects (in the form of ‘poverty conditions’) are cantilevered. It tries to discover and explore the multiform and fragmentary everyday operations of life in Windsor that are “insinuated and concealed within devices”, such as *sufferation*, *struggle* or *hardship*, “whose mode of usage they constitute, and thus lacking their own ideologies or institutions” (de Certeau, 1984:XV). Following Bhabha (1992:143) then, the aim here is “to hazard the incommunicability that shapes the public moment” and which tends to obscure “the immediacy of meaning” by subsuming the minutia of living experiences under generalised concepts. The effort comprised here is hazardous because the *everyday practices* being sought are easily buried in a sort of ‘unconsciousness’ in that they become lost in, or take “precisely the form of a way of narrating them” (de Certeau, 1984:80). Additionally, it is hazardous because the mundanities of the lived are so individuated as to be perceived as inconsequential, easily forgotten or in other cases they are ineffable (as in the case of Singer). Thus, they are immeasurable in a conventional sense. The autophotographic accounts to be presented later provided an opportunity to ‘capture’ (though

imprecisely and incompletely) what are perhaps traces of the *liminal* in ways of *experiencing* everyday suffering.

This chapter begins with a detailed description of the procedures used in the autophotographic exercise conducted in Windsor as part of this broader study into relations of deprivation, before going on to outline some of the interactions specific to this kind of photographic research. Attention is then turned to the results of the process and the focus is on the 'subjects' that participants have pictured as a distinct level of interpretation. 'What the pictures show/say' is dealt with as a separate level of interpretation and from the ensuing analyses, three photo-essays are organised around different permutations of 'everydayness'. The conclusion considers the implications of investigations into the intricacies of 'going through' hardship for poverty research.

## **7.2. Autophotography in Windsor**

Prior to taking a scheduled break from my fieldwork, I began taking pictures of various aspects of the community that I saw as important in displaying its composition and *difference*. On one of these days I was having an informal conversation with an informant and I asked in passing what things in Windsor he thought it would be worthwhile to photograph. He launched into a number of sites that "must" be shown and explained why they were relevant (Informal Conversation with Tango, Field Diary Entry: Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2008). This struck a chord with methods I had been exposed to in the literature and led to the deployment of a new research method. Recalling the work of Dodman (2003a, 2003b, 2004) which detailed the use of autophotography in examining

children's perceptions of their surroundings in Kingston, it was thought that allowing the Windsor residents to carry out a similar exercise may prove successful.

This may be seen as preferable to a researcher-based attempt at photographing aspects of the community, primarily since, as Ruby (1973:13) suggested, pictures taken by researchers are usually only peripheral to the research problem. As a result, they are typically not used as data for analysis or evidence of the arguments made. I was taking images that would stand more as memorabilia of the fieldwork experience and in the end only one or two would enter the study as illustrations of specific characteristics of the locality. Autophotography, reverses this tradition as introduced in the work of Ziller (1990; see also, Ziller & Smith, 1977; Ziller & Vern, 1988), developed by Aitken and Wingate (1993), Dollinger and Clancy (1993), Radley *et al* (2005) and applied to Jamaica through Dodman's (2003a, 2003b, 2004) study on the urban environment in Kingston. It enables participants to 'picture' features of their lives and surroundings in answer to a researcher designed question, but in ways that are important to them and that tell of themselves (*i.e.* show facets of their identity). As such, images that would have ordinarily been decorative would, through this method, be imbued with meaning, theoretical value and be open to reflexive critique.

In most artistic paintings and drawings (such as personal portraits or portraits of things owned by persons) there is usually a sense of collaboration between the artist and the subject (see, Crimp, 1989:5). To march into the field and *take* pictures is to, in one sense, steal the opportunity of the protagonists to aid in authoring the representation of their life world and a denial of a chance for them to contribute to the 'impression' that will be created of them. To engage individuals in *giving* pictures of their lives is to, at least on one symbolic level, escape the field without 'capturing' or

'taking' visual depictions that were not intentionally entrusted to the researcher. Despite the fact that there is always in this method (as with all methods) the danger of a range of abuses especially where critical reflection is ignored, participant-directed photography avoids a type of exploitation that concentrates control over how the dominated are represented exclusively in the hands of researchers and other centres of official discourse production. An attempt is made here to not only display some of the pictures that have been contributed, but to place these images within the participants' narratives (though these accounts have undoubtedly been influenced by multiple relations of power in the process).

Six digital cameras were acquired while I was on my break from the field and this facilitated the design of a month long strategy to engage 12 youths, preferably six females and six males, to participate in the exercise. The specific procedures undertaken are outlined below:

- (i) At a regular Windsor Youth Club meeting volunteers were sought to take part in the autophotographic task. The appeal for six females and six males was fully answered and the details of each volunteer were recorded so that they could be contacted to receive the cameras and details on the activity (Field Diary Entry: Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> of August, 2008).
- (ii) Two rounds of camera distribution/data collection were planned (three females and three males in each). Each participant in the first phase was contacted individually and they were given identical instructions.
- (iii) Upon receiving a camera, volunteers were asked to: "take 10 pictures showing what living in Windsor is like". They were told to take their pictures in a week and that at the end of this period the cameras (with the pictures) would be collected and a discussion had on each photograph. They were also instructed on how to use the camera and told not to worry about photographic skills as this was not the focus of the exercise. After the instructions,

participants had an opportunity to ask questions about the procedures or other aspects of the research.

- (iv) At the one-on-one 'photo review' sessions arranged for each participant, the photos taken were transferred to a laptop computer so that they could be clearly visible to both researcher and participant. It also allowed for display flexibility as the pictures could be viewed separately or multiple images could be shown at once.
- (v) Two distinctive tasks were to be completed in the photo reviews: firstly, there was an attempt to find out what was the *subject*<sup>57</sup> of each photo with the question: "what is this a picture of?" This was then used for labelling the photographs. Secondly, there was a search for the message or signification(s) of each by asking: "what does this picture show/say?"
- (vi) The second round would replicate the above described procedures with the remaining participants. All the reviews would be recorded.

The activity was organised such that, in a best case scenario, it would have been completed within a two week period. However, a month was allotted to allow for delays and problems in arranging photo reviews. As it turned out this was essential and even then not all went as planned. Only eight persons (five males and three females) completed the exercise because, for various reasons, four of the volunteers were unable to carry out the procedures as outlined in the sections above: one female took eight pictures, but a mutually convenient time for a photo review session could not be arranged (her camera was returned by a family member) while two females and one male participant did not take any pictures and entirely withdrew (citing a lack of interest or being too busy).

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<sup>57</sup> The term "subject" as used in the autophotography literature denotes interchangeably (a) the entity pictured (as in the subject of the photograph); or (b) the participant who took the pictures (as in the subject of the study). Here subject refers exclusively to the former, that is, to the object, scene, person or interaction that was selected as the target to be photographed.

Those who completed the process seemed enthusiastic about contributing to an unconventional research activity. This enthusiasm was evident in the planned photo review sessions in different ways: (a) none of the eight participants who completed the process had taken 10 pictures. They all took between 12 and 20, with the total number of photographs being 115; (b) they had remained on task and their photographs and descriptions, in general, showed attention and deep reflection on the exercise; and (c) the photo review sessions which were meant to be relatively short exchanges (30 minutes to an hour), all went close to or over two hours.

### 7.2.1 On Images and (Accompanying) Texts

Though it is important to reflect on verisimilitude in images, the focus here is not on the nature of what has been captured, but on the traces of the *histories* which may be gleaned from an encounter with a photograph. To the extent that it is accepted that any reality (new or otherwise) inhabits the image, then each visible component of the photograph represents a distinct appreciable entity. Therefore meanings, which are socially mediated and which tend always toward imperfection, exist *ad infinitum*. With this in mind, it is important to temper the exuberance of Barthes' claims that "the image is not reality but it is its perfect *analogon*" (1977:17) by making clear that every photograph is the result of specific and "significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place" (Tagg, 1988:2). Additionally, as soon as a picture is encountered by an observer (its 'taker' or anyone else) it is assaulted by an infinite barrage of customs of appreciation derived from both the viewer's individual perspective and the cultural approach brought by that person to photographs and photography. This innate instability of realities and interpretations has numerous implications for how researchers are able to use photographs and write about them.

Commenting on Renard's photo-essay on police repression of drug users in Russia, Schonberg and Bourgois (2002:388) argued that without text the meaning of the photographs would be lost or turned upside down. In illustrating this, they allude to one of Renard's photos which, if viewed without an explanation (unless by someone familiar with the activity represented), would be confusing. They explain:

Two men might be wrestling; one might be stabbing the other in the eye or trying to inject a drug through the other's eye membrane. The caption, however, effectively clarifies, "Eye drops made from crushed anti-indigestion pills are mixed with water to counteract constriction of the eye pupils, a sign of heroin use, and enough to be stopped by the police" (Schonberg & Bourgois, 2002:388).

Schonberg and Bourgois came to the conclusion that it is risky or irresponsible to trust images of marginalisation, suffering and destruction to a sometimes reckless and frequently judgemental public. They make it clear that "letting a picture speak its thousand words can result in a thousand lies" (Schonberg & Bourgois, 2002:388). The problem then becomes one of deciding on the narrative that will be used to domesticate the unruliness of interpretations. Is the focus of the accompanying text going to be on the most prominent feature(s) of the photograph? Is it going to be on the aspects that may be confused by observers? Or will it be based on the intent of the photographer (if that can ever be truly located)? These quandaries and others must be considered while remaining critically conscious of any direction taken.

A photograph makes a contingent and ambiguous depictive intervention in space-time, but the inclination is to view it as a decisively seized juncture in the seamless occurrence of the lived. Because they are indexical in nature (and so incomplete), pictures demand and usually receive descriptions, explanations or interpretations of their referents and may as a result be said to possess a "narrative poverty" (Bolton, 1992:xii). In this way, the image is seen as a break in

reality and the inclination is to apply connotations that deal with it as such. For example, Mark (1983) noted in her excellent and emotive photo-essay, *Streetwise* (which accompanied a critically acclaimed documentary film of the same name), that:

As a still photographer I had photographed many situations that were highly emotionally charged. Even though those situations sometimes led me to take very strong photographs, when I looked at my contact sheets I always remembered the real situation as being even stronger than the photograph. With the filming of Tiny's and Pat's argument, for the first time I was seeing something unfold before me that was being totally captured.

The texts that follow the images in her work are meant to reliably concatenate the image and the real occurrence. In Mark's estimation, words are needed because while film is believed to offer perfection in terms of capturing reality, pictures are a less strong version of 'the real situation'. This means, an image mirrors a necessarily true instance and holds within it the *evidence* of the captured moment which may be further *realised* with captions. Tagg (1988:4) vehemently opposes this kind of thinking by contending that how a photograph can come to stand as evidence is not a matter of natural or existential fact. Rather, the picture gains its 'evidentiary force' from a complex historical outcome that develops "only within certain institutional practices and within particular historical relations".

Absolutist interpretations colonise meanings and deny the existence of the many transactions involved in producing images as 'captured' and describable duplications of reality. Texts which establish exclusive authority over the connotative possibilities of images are not *real-ising* a duplicated though 'broken' instance. These annotations forcibly impose onto the image an existential quality not congenital to it and which emerges from the antecedent semiotic conventions that have been constructed through social practice. Nevertheless, even researchers who recognise the transformative effects of texts on the already slippery and volatile act of



observing photographic representations usually respond to the need to speak on the image. In a research context, it would be remiss to leave the picture with no descriptors and claim that this would empower all viewers to take from the photograph equally valid subjective meanings. As Schonberg and Bourgois (2002) identified, such a strategy might be proven antithetical to the objectives of the study. Furthermore, the lack of text may only create the “illusion of neutrality” while simultaneously masking and naturalising the self-effacing processes involved in interpretive practices (Bolton, 1992:xii).

My intention initially with the photographic method applied in this research was to use images to ‘show’ aspects of lived experiences selected by participants. Texts were to be employed to elucidate what was in the pictures and how the targeted subject related to experiences. The results of the enterprise demanded that a radically different direction be taken. Specifically, the commentaries attached to the images in this chapter are used as nodes in practices of interpretation that are never static, even for a single individual. Within the autophotographic exercise carried out in Windsor, there was often a palpable interpretive gap between the labels given to each picture (*what is the image a picture of?*) and the ‘message’ inspired by the subject (*what does the image show/say?*). Both were meanings, but also quite often, both were reading different significations into the same subject. These contrasts created the need to view interpretation deliberately, rather than as an avenue to a conclusively *real truth* or *true reality*.

### **7.3. The Interactive Intervals of Autophotography**

Ziller (1990:22) made the assertion that “photography is a discourse between the photographer, the subject of the photograph and the viewer”. In autophotography, an additional variable has been added to the equation by allowing the participants to ‘self-direct’ and there are innumerable interactions in play. As a result, the relations are irreducibly more complex in that at all stages of the process, all the principals (researcher, audience, photographer and subject) have varying levels of influence on the decisions made. For example, in the design of the method the researcher takes into account what the audience will make of the data gathered in relation to what is widely ‘known’ about the subject and also considers the relationship with the participant.

A simplified variant of the interactive trajectory can be viewed as developing from the initial conversation between photographer and researcher. This first contact becomes essential in the later engagement between the participants and the ‘subjects’ they picture (since the task given is important to choices of subject selection). The researcher, having collected the images, sets in motion a whole range of analytical techniques before a symbolic exchange can occur between the displayed subjects and the audience reading the completed study (this puts the reader in contact with both photographer and researcher). Two intervals in these relations are examined below, firstly, the interplay between ‘researcher, photographer and subject’, before turning to the analytical processes deployed.

### 7.3.1 The Researcher, the Photographer and the Subject

The volunteers for the exercise were asked to: “take 10 pictures showing what it is like to live in Windsor” and as noted previously, all the participants had taken more than 10 photographs. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that within the selections made, there were often multiple angles or different variations of the same referent. My inclination was to use the ‘best’ and exclude the rest of these ‘extras’. However, this position was quickly revised. In the first photo review session the issue arose and Tango was asked why there were two pictures of the community’s mineral spring, he replied: “boss, you can’t have the Mineral and don’t show it when the fire light and when the fire don’t light. We bathe in it both way” (Photo Review Transcript #1). It was clear that in many cases the ‘multiple-aspect’ approach addressed a methodological oversight about how spaces are lived and viewed.

**Photo 7:1 Tango's Pictures of the ‘Mineral’**



The fact that a single subject of interest could be *seen*, used and experienced in different ways had not been considered in designing the task. Nonetheless, the ‘multiple-aspect’ tactic of photography was employed by all the participants (to different extremes) and emerged in relation to numerous pictured features and moments including, *inter alia*, houses (‘good’ and ‘bad’ dwellings), roads and gullies (at separate sites in the community) as well as various ways of and

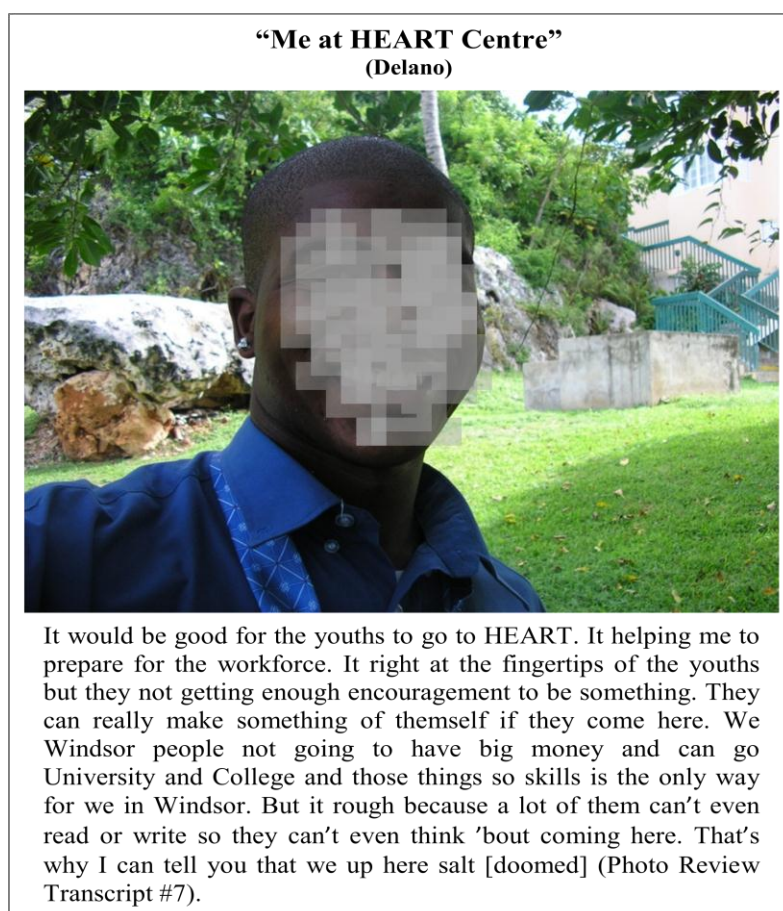
places for hanging out. This manoeuvre was also interesting because rather than simply taking a single picture of an important target and then using it to discuss different permutations and feelings on it, the tendency for most participants was to attempt to capture the distinct ways in which the subject could be experienced. To the photographers then, the directive by the researcher to take “10 pictures” was not an essential factor in conducting the exercise; they were also guided in their choices by what they wanted to show and say about how they lived. The negotiations about what was most important to them (in relation to the task) and manoeuvring around the limitations set by the researcher proved decisive in how the pictures could be analysed and what they came to represent in the study.

In addition, of all the 115 pictures taken, only two could be said to be conclusively ‘outside’ Windsor’s boundaries. There were five other photos that showed places and activities beyond the formal borders, but which are used and considered as part of the community. Two were of the “Windsor Lawn” (by Singer), and the other three were of the “Bottom Pipe” (by Kelly). In name, cognition and usage both facilities could be said to *belong* to Windsor.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, in terms of the location of the selected subjects, the directive to capture images showing what it is like “living *in Windsor*” was understood very literally by the participants. Though this was not necessarily the intention of the instructions given, there were almost no pictorial depictions of interactions outside the community. The only exception to this was Delano who took two pictures of subjects spatially well beyond Windsor, but which he nevertheless saw as integral to life outcomes for himself and his peers. In one of these, Delano took a picture of himself at the government-run, skills-training facility he attends, the Human Employment and Resource Training Trust (HEART Trust).

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 4 for a description and map of the community.

**Photo 7:2 One of Delano's Two Photographs Taken Outside Windsor<sup>59</sup>**



The subject, HEART, being located outside the community does not, for Delano, diminish its centrality to life possibilities. As a Windsor resident, he constructs the training provided by this facility as the only means of self-improvement (this can be seen in the interpretation provided).

Unlike location which was narrowly conceived of (with almost all images being inside Windsor), *living* was interpreted and represented in very broad senses. The images and explanations dealt with aspects of life including but not exclusive to, entertainment, housing, sports, the environment, and socio-economic status. The surprisingly exhaustive range of experiences represented in the photographs and also in the photo reviews, on some occasions began to

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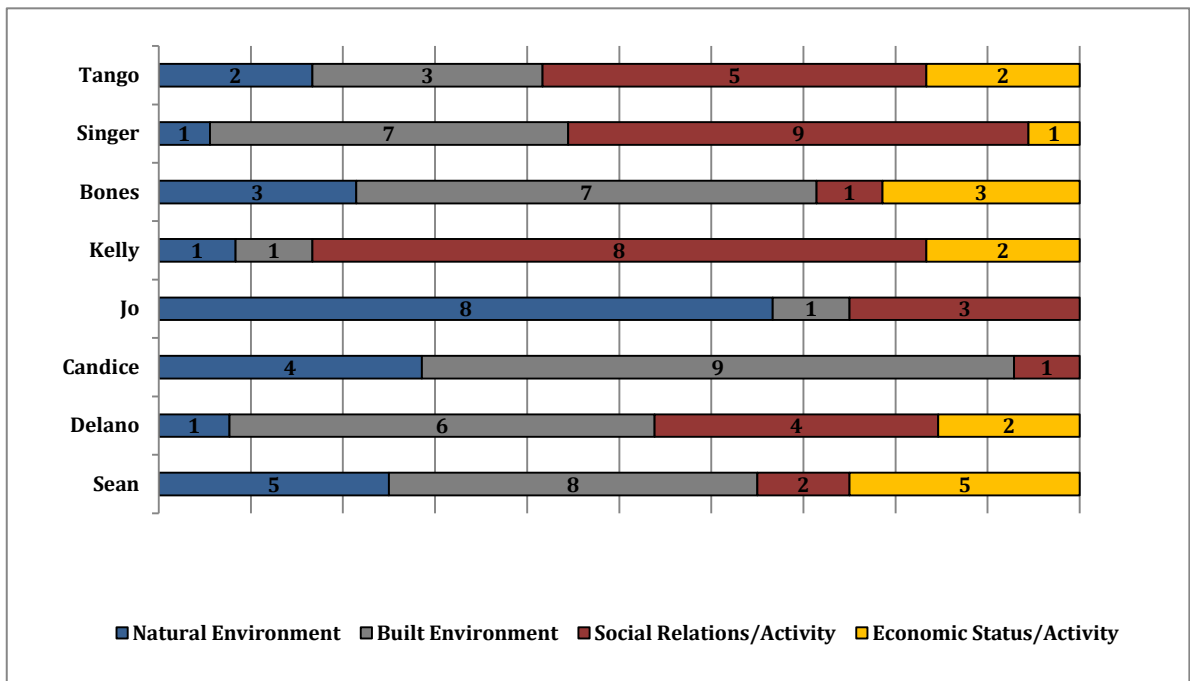
<sup>59</sup> For the other subject that Delano pictured outside of Windsor, see page 292.

inspire lengthy and interesting interpretations. It was abundantly clear that the subject pictured were often more than merely reflections of reality that were to be directly explained. In many cases they would only initiate a detailed exploration of a problematic community issue or an emotive personal story. From this approach to the photograph and researcher, came the realisation mentioned in the introduction that 'poverty' inasmuch as it could be said to exist in conditions, relations or structures, may also find resonance with the quotidian – the day-to-day mundanities that contain within them the struggles and sufferings of people. This is explored later in the chapter.

### **7.3.2 Analytical Techniques (in Relation to the Subject)**

Two levels of analysis were conducted. The first used a descriptive system of categorisation and the second took a 'photo-essay' approach in presenting the results. The specifics of photo-essays are based on the 'stories' and messages of the pictures and will be examined in the final section of the chapter. This section focuses on the interrogative tactics applied to the images and their given labels. It draws from the data collected in the first question of the photo review sessions ("what is this a picture of?"). So as to provide a general understanding of this layer of meaning, a *leitmotif* coding framework was developed based on adaptations from Ziller and Vern (1988); Dollinger and Clancy (1993); and Aitken and Wingate (1993). The categories employed here borrow in many ways from those used in the above cited studies, but with a number of significant modifications. These alterations resulted from the fact that the primary focus was not in maintaining any pre-defined set of groupings and strategies. Instead, the emphasis was on ensuring that the recurring themes in the labels provided by the participants were categorised and accounted for so that this level of meaning would be given due acknowledgement (see Figure 7:1 on page 267 and Table 7:1 on page 271). The considerations which informed this mode of analysis are presented below.

At the outset of the analytical process, Ziller's (1990:39) suggestion that "the first step in the development of coding categories is the display of the entire field of sets of photographs," was followed. All the photographs were tagged with their label, divorced from their explanations, printed, and then arranged according to the participant. The next step was to bring into focus the instruction given to the participants ("take 10 pictures showing what living in Windsor is like") and to seek within each participants' montage an answer to the question: "what things does *living* constitute?" The pictured subjects were grouped together, according to the answers. Significantly, this made it possible to see patterns of picture taking that were unique to each individual. Also, the most popular subjects across participants could now be identified. These were: housing, gullies, the Mineral, the river, the road, hanging out, and sports activities. There were fewer pictures of certain subjects that nevertheless were recurrent across the participants such as, playing fields, using the standpipe and livelihood activities. Additionally, there were a number of outliers (subjects pictured only by a few) such as, churches, the bridge, garbage disposal and the 'poor' status of some residents. By looking at the trends (see Figure 7:1), *living* in the view of these youths, seemed to be mainly focused on certain existential considerations, namely: (a) spaces of consumption ('natural', government built, or privately built spaces); (b) various social dynamics and interactions; and (c) various socio-economic statuses and livelihood factors. The groupings were streamlined into the following categories: Natural Environment, Built Environment, Social Relations/Activity, and Economic Status/Activity. Each photograph was classified under one of these categories.

**Figure 7:1 The Number of Pictures Taken by Each Participant in Each Category**

At the centre of one of Jo's photographs labelled, *The Shallow Part of the River*, a group of children can be observed apparently playing. The children were not mentioned in the naming of the image; neither were they referred to when discussing what the picture was saying. This is a clear interpretive move and without the label Jo's intention of depicting an aspect of the environment could not have been determined because the image is multivocal. Jo's treatment of this picture is instructive in two ways. Firstly, it points to the need to allow the photographer to say what has been captured. My inclination as a viewer would have been to call this image 'children playing in the river' which would make it a signifier of social relations. Yet, the activity of the children was not relevant to the subject of Jo's photograph which was to depict a part of the natural environment.



**Photo 7:3 The River as Subject of Focus in Jo's Multivocal Image**

**"The Shallow Part of the River"**  
(Jo)



This part of the river was nice when I was growing, we used to catch crazy fish (a lot) from this part. But the river dirty now. I don't even go in it no more because my skin scratch me when I come out. What make it worse to is that when water not running [when no water is at the standpipe] is down here people have to come drink and it don't clean (Photo Review Transcript #5).

Secondly, Jo's treatment of the picture demonstrates the importance of keeping the label as a separate level of interpretation. The aspects of their lives that the participants have selected (from the myriad options available) as worthy of picturing is a sufficient basis for eliciting partial impressions of how their world is viewed. Also (as in Jo's case), the label given or frequently what is visible in the image is many times quite different from what the subject is said to *show* when detailed explanations are provided. Ostensible in Jo's image, is the fact that the part of the river pictured is shallow. Thus, a descriptive title was chosen. A number of questions may be asked about the labelling strategy used: why talk about the "shallow part"? And are there non-shallow parts? Jo took three pictures of different aspects of the river and from this it may be deduced that the river is an important subject to this participant (the label of each being a part of a strategy). Exactly in what ways it is important is another matter. Indeed, Jo would go on to comment on some of the social implications of the shallow part of the river, but these statements were in

response to an exploration of: *what the picture is showing/saying* which made use of a completely different interpretive convention from an inquiry into *what is pictured*. Therefore, *leitmotif* coding was focused on the label given to the image as this would consistently reflect the picturing approach taken. Exclusively examining the former would disguise the deliberate picturing strategy used.

There were three principal motivations for adopting a modified version of the classificatory framework pioneered by Ziller. Firstly, 115 photographs were taken, each with multiple messages and significations. Most of these would go unaccounted for as there would only be space for those thought to be most poignant and the most relevant when carrying out in-depth and individual examinations. The system of aggregation used offers one sort of corrective to the exclusion, in that, all the images are given some kind of 'showing' and consideration (e.g. Table 7:1 comprises of a tabulation of all the subjects pictured and where possible the specific labels are used). Secondly, although there will be a more expansive treatment of the 'stories' of a selection of the photographs, as argued previously, the messages of pictures do not necessarily align perfectly with what is featured in them. The different levels of analysis demonstrate clearly that even for a single photographer there may be varying meanings derived from a single image. Thirdly, and following from both points made above, the use of labels as one method of assessing how the community is viewed and lived by the photographers enables comparisons to be made and differences identified about the aspects of living in Windsor that are prominent. In particular, it facilitates the development of an idea of certain *aesthetics* of the community.

Regarding the third motivation, a significant qualification must be made about how the information in the *leitmotif* framework should be read. It is essential to note that there is no attempt to

generalise based on the categories or to explain the differences between participants that may be identified. The endeavour has instead been structured in an exploratory and descriptive manner. Furthermore, since only eight persons fully completed the exercise, any attempt at generalisation would be extremely dubious if not completely hallow. The *leitmotif* coding does however allow for one layer of meaning to be translated into a descriptive overview of certain aspects of the experiences of this specific group of youths. Also, a structured aggregation of the subjects photographed makes it possible to take a glimpse at some of the multiple ways in which *living in Windsor* can be conceived and represented.

Finally, it should also be noted that the categories are themselves constructs. Lefebvre (1991:83) noted of some 'natural' spaces (such as the "The Mineral" pictured by many of the participants), that "it is not at all easy to decide whether such spaces are natural or artificial. The fact is that the once-prevalent characteristic 'natural' has grown indistinct and become a subordinate feature". The Mineral could be justifiably classified under the 'Built' category due to its concrete encasement or the 'Economic' category because of its conscription into the livelihoods strategy of some residents of the community. The same applies for the built environment. A house, usually considered an unshakable component of the built environment is irrevocably entangled in the realms of the social through its constitution as a 'property relation' (*i.e.* relation between people about things) and also in the economic sphere based on its value as 'security' or an exchangeable asset. When concepts such as "Natural Environment", "Built Environment", "Social Relations/Activities" or "Economic Status/Activities" are deployed they do not refer to, intrinsically *real* entities, instead a discursive cut is being made into an otherwise undifferentiated world so as to engage in analyses and formulate responses to complex phenomena.

**Table 7:1 The Analytical Categories as Developed from the Leitmotif Coding of the 'Subject' of the Photographs<sup>60</sup>**

Participant	# of Pics	Natural Environment	# of Pics	Built Environment	# of Pics	Social Relations/Activity	# of Pics	Economic Status/Activity	# of Pics
1. Tango	12	The Mineral (various uses - with/without fire)	2	Houses in Windsor	3	Hanging out (bars, shops, street)	5	'My Brethren Pig Farm'	1
								'Some Poor Little Beggar Children'	1
2. Singer	18	'The Mineral'	1	'Windsor Road'	1	Hanging out (at girls' home gate)	2	'The Only Job My Sister Can Get'	1
				Windsor Girls' Home	2	Playing sports (football, cricket)	4		
				Various Houses in Windsor	3	Partying in Windsor	2		
				'New Ball Ground'	1	'Stepdad Working on our House'	1		
3. Bones	14	'A Nice Garden'	1	Various Houses in Windsor	5	'Brother and Nieces Living Loving'	1	'Shops Closing-Down Because No Money Here'	1
				'Friend Broke-Down kitchen'	1			Poor kids from the community	2
		The river (various sites)	2	'Thieving Light'	1				
4. Kelly	12	'The River'	1	'Horrible Windsor Road'	1	'Kids Bathing in the River'	1	'Buying from the Cheap Shop'	1
						People using the bottom pipe	3		
						Garbage disposal methods	2	'Water Seller'	1
						'Our Youth Club Meeting'	1		
						'Windsor Sunday Hanging Out'	1		
5. Jo	12	The river (various sites)	3	'My House'	1	Training and hanging out with dance crew	3		
		Community greenery	3						
		Mineral (with/without fire)	2						
6. Candice	14	Various gullies in Windsor	4	Two playing fields	2	'My Cousin at the Standpipe'	1		
				The bridge	2				
				The different roads	3				
				Churches in Windsor	2				
7. Delano	13	'A Wicked Gully'	1	The two playing fields	2	'How We Deal With Garbage'	1	'Men at their Work'	1
				The bridge	2			'Beyond Poverty'	1
				'A Windsor House'	1	'Kids Coming From School'	1		
				'The Marcus Garvey Statue'	1	'People Using the Pipe'	1		
						'Me at HEART Centre'	1		
8. Sean	20	Gullies (various sites)	2	The standpipe	2	'Kids Coming From School'	1	'Trying Youths Doing a Thing to Make Money'	1
				'Our Church'	1				
		The river (various sites and their uses)	3	'The Basic School'	1	'Kids Playing Football'	1	Various farms and farming activities	4
				'The State of Houses in Windsor'	1				
				The state of different roads	3				
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>		<b>25</b>		<b>42</b>		<b>33</b>		<b>15</b>

<sup>60</sup> For multiple aspects of a single subject, there is an aggregated description. However in the case of single pictures of a subject the photographer's label has been used.

## **7.4. An Analysis of Autophotographic Practices and Patterns: Theories and Aesthetics of *Living***

One of the main aims of the autophotographic exercise was to conduct an exploration into lived experiences by means of experiential imagery. The subjects captured covered a wide array of areas of interest, but there was nevertheless in all the images and labels an easily recognisable relevance (though in different ways) to *living* in Windsor. Becker (1974:15) has posited that when people speak of having “captured” something on camera, they generally refer to a “characteristic feature”. As seen in Jo’s *The Shallow Part of the River*, because of the multiple messages that constitute images, if the photographer does not identify the target, then the intent of the picture might never be known. If, as is postulated by Ziller (1990:10), “understanding develops as the self-theory of the other is perceived”, then by *looking at* and examining the subjects photographed, it becomes possible to reconstruct proximate impressions of aesthetics of community as seen by these youths. The route to such an understanding is to avoid being seduced by the statistical appurtenances of the framework and to instead circumspectly unravel the identity infused narratives that are embedded in the data.

### **7.4.1 Autophotographic *Theories* of ‘Living in Windsor’**

There was explicit in the autophotographic task, an assumption that the individuals taking part had some knowledge of photographic conventions (even if not necessarily knowledge of how to use the specific device) and a developed self awareness (or at least the ability to develop a sense of self). By their very nature, photographs and photography necessitate the presence of certain technical, cultural and historical processes. Prior to actually taking pictures, the youths charged with *giving* these fragments of their lives had to undertake processes of selection involving:

discernment (recognition of their environment); distinction (differentiation between types of experiences); and discrimination (preference for some representative aspects over others). Guided by the imperative to pictorially “show what living in Windsor is like,” the photographers were likely to have undertaken a number of calculations on: (a) what specific characteristics can be identified to answer the question; (b) whether these features were best reflected through objects, scenes, people, or interactions between people; and (c) the best way(s) to take a picture of the decided upon subject. Each subject had to be evaluated separately so as to determine their worth and each demanded its own photographic treatment. Therefore, it is the argument here that each participant’s montage (even if unconscious) required the interweaving of determinations on the value of certain topics of interest and deliberations on how best to capture them. As a result, each body of pictures may be viewed as a separate “theory about what is worth attending to” (Ziller, 1990:24) and thus a separate *theory of living in Windsor*.

Differences in conceiving of and treating elements of experience may be illustrated by examining any subject pictured by more than one participant. Both Singer and Sean selected ‘Windsor houses’ as one of their areas of interest. This means, for both, issues surrounding housing may be considered as a relatively significant component of their experiences in Windsor. Yet, while Sean took a single picture labelled, *The State of Houses in Windsor*, Singer took three different photographs which were labelled, *Two Very Poor House on Bobo Hill*, *A Poor Person House on Round Hill*, and *My House that Coming Along*. As shown below there is a large lacunae in how these two youths think of housing which determined how they chose to picture it and in turn contributed to their respective overall theories on living in Windsor.

**Photo 7:4 Singer's and Sean's Approaches to 'Windsor Houses'**

**"Two Very Poor House on Bobo Hill"**  
(Singer)



**"A Poor Person House on Round Hill"**  
(Singer)



**"My House That Coming Along"**  
(Singer)



**"The State of Houses in Windsor"**  
(Sean)



For Sean, even without looking at the image, the title of the picture indicates that he is not neutral (though the orientation is only suggested in the title itself). By making this single image representative of the general 'state of houses in Windsor' as opposed to simply 'a house in Windsor', he imposes a dual ideology. The observer is firstly, forced into accepting (or denying) his pictorial/labelling thesis that this house is indicative of houses in Windsor generally and secondly, must then also consider whether there is something distinct about Windsor's houses when compared to those in other communities. Thus, because Sean's image is made a

specifically Windsor phenomenon, there is a strong push towards a comparative exercise. In contrast, Singer's approach is inward focused and the three houses he photographs are *set along* an internal continuum. The narrative his labels present may be read as a commentary on 'the very bad', 'the bad' and 'the progress to something good'. The first two are given locations within the community and this is a significant strategy in itself. When considered separately it becomes clear that each house exists in a particular part of the community and also that within their location they are examples of only one type in a range of houses. The final house is 'coming along', and though it is not placed, the fact that it is in transition suggests that there is somewhere to 'reach' with a dwelling. Taken together then, to Singer, houses do more than just provide an abode; they are status markers which indicate where dwellers are in relation to others in their surroundings.

Differences of this kind abound. The decisions made by the individuals who participated in the exercise did not entail benignly capturing randomly selected subjects or aspects thereof. Indeed, the minute and at other times substantial divergences constitute much more than objectively observable *aspect(s)* of life in this community; they are conceptually-mediated pictures of experience. However, the commentaries on housing do not in and of themselves form theories; they have been cut from larger systems of representation and camera usage. All eight participants dealt with several topics and used numerous strategies of picture taking. This means each participant's montage represents a particular understanding of and orientation toward their locality that is distinctly 'theoretical'. Space does not allow for each theory to be explored and as such representative examples from one (Sean's pictures), has been selected and juxtaposed against others in a discussion of the participants' use of strategies and aesthetics.



### 7.4.2 The Aesthetics of 'Living in Windsor'

According to Boltanski, "the photographer no longer attempts to capture reality; he attempts to reproduce a pre-existing and culturally imposed image" (Boltanski & Renard, 1994:177). The fact that the photographs within this study were specifically commissioned to meet a set aim means that they emerged from and are now cemented in a particular discursive system – part of the academic world of proposition, deliberation and critique. Inevitably, this academic imperative impacts upon the orientations of photographers in different and indeterminate ways. Ruby (1973), for instance, aptly noted that giving cameras to people as a research method, does not eradicate the possibility that the pictures will be more of a reflection of the researcher's culture than the participant's. This is a difficult assertion to validate, but even if its precepts were correct, the participants would still need to have interpreted the researcher's intentions and in this they would present something of themselves.

Ruby's warning must be borne in mind, but it is not being engaged here. The aim at this point is to detail the visual valence of the images and labels and to show certain ocular evocations gleaned from the participants' approaches. These ocular evocations or *aesthetics* have been divided into three distinguishable monads which have been detected in the body of pictorial data: 'ordinary aesthetic', 'critical aesthetic' and 'sufferation aesthetic'. The ocular features to be explored do not necessarily operate in isolation and in fact, in most pictures, the varying *aesthetics* interact and intersect. Taking this into account, the analysis conducted here draws upon the characteristic which appears to be most prominent in the label-image interplay of a given picture so as to discuss the relevant imagery effect.

#### 7.4.2.1 The Ordinary Aesthetic

The photographs in this study may be 'pictures of ordinary experiences' since they represent sites, scenes and interactions that are observable on a daily basis in Windsor. Yet, they cannot be considered 'ordinary pictures' because they were not taken for personal consumption, but to fulfil a research objective. *Ordinary aesthetics* are structured by cultural practices which determine the appropriate times, reasons and ways to employ photography (e.g. pictures are taken: for family albums, on trips to foreign places, or at important events such as weddings/graduations). In these conventions individuals try to frame for posterity some elements of their lives (or images of those close to them), capture the unusual (as proof of existence), or seek out the iconic aspects of an area (proof of having been there). It is of this culture Boltanski warned when he stated: "anyone visiting a place has already seen so many pictures of it that they can only attempt to view it via these clichés" (Boltanski & Renard, 1994:177). With this in mind, the issue here is whether the participants in this study have responded to the 'poverty clichés' associated with Windsor. Have they depicted aspects of their community that seem out of the way and alarming? Or have they followed an alternate course as produced from a combination of established customs and the research directive?

A quick perusal of the subjects of focus (as may be seen in Table 7:1) immediately reveals that all the participants at some point appealed to either the 'personal', 'tourist' or the 'alarm' strains of the ordinary. For example: (a) Sean, reflects the 'tourist' pattern by picturing the points of interest such as *Our Church* and *The Basic School* which are undoubtedly important institutions; (b) Tango, Singer and Jo pictured *The Mineral*, a popular local resource which attracts many outsiders to the community; (c) the dangerous and rubbish-laden gullies, captured by three persons appeal to a number of aesthetics. However, for Delano who labelled his image, *A Wicked Gully*, there seemed to be in this title, a strong intention to excite interest and alarm; and (d) the

clearest sign of ordinary picture taking was the posing of friends in some of the images of hanging out (an activity which has various permutations and was a popular subject). Most of these images seemed to be aimed at pointing to a sense of normalcy by presenting the interesting sites and scenes while others evoked a sense of shock at some things which would be featured in clichés about Windsor.

#### 7.4.2.2 The Critical Aesthetic

An interesting element of the interaction between images and texts is that when combined with a conceptual purpose, they can be used to open up discussions and debates around controversial subjects. Within the body of pictures analysed, perhaps the most explicit sign of theoretical perspectives in conducting the autophotographic exercise was in the use of this *critical aesthetic*. Strewn throughout the categories and exemplified in at least a third of the pictures of each participant, was an engagement of imagery and labelling with contested community issues. For example, implicit in the labels, *Horrible Windsor Road* (Kelly) and *Trying Youths Doing a Thing to Make Money* (Sean) is a positioning in relation to the topic of interest. However, it is only on seeing Kelly's picture of the Windsor Road which focused on a particularly deep forklike pothole, that the meaning of horrible is recognised and understood. The same applies in Sean's example, since 'doing a thing' is a mystery before viewing the pictured image of a young man building a wooden structure (presumably a shop).

**Photo 7:5 The Critical Aesthetic as Appealed to by Kelly and Sean**



The *critical aesthetic* in Sean’s photograph resides in his incursion into discourses on youths and productive activity in Windsor. He thought it important firstly, to show economic endeavour as a feature of his community and secondly, to use the pictured individual as representative of a category of ‘trying youths’ which stands as a corrective to the maligned status afflicting Windsor youths in general. This is a visual and textual declaration of the fact that there are ambitious, industrious and indeed ‘trying’ young people in Windsor.

In the critical mode of pictorial representation, the label may suggest an orientation or may excite speculation on a subject, but almost always the final judgement on the issue is to be found in the image. Delano’s *How We Deal with Garbage*, is different from the pictures above in that he does not within the label indicate an attitude on the subject. Instead, when read without examining the image a number of questions arise: how is garbage dealt with? Is the method somehow unique or abnormal? Does the photographer think it is good or bad?

**Photo 7:6 The Critical Aesthetic as Appealed to by Delano**



The aesthetic is allowed to provide the responses. Once the picture is viewed, the label serves another purpose – with hints of scorn and sarcasm, it becomes a statement indicating that “we” should not be disposing of garbage in this manner. The title and the image combine to form a potent critique of the collective self (*i.e.* all Windsor inhabitants). As opposed to the ‘wicked’ gully he pictured earlier, which was inviting attention and alarm rather than condemnation, he allows the image of the garbage to make its own commentary on practices he apparently abhors but sees as prevalent in the community.

**7.4.2.3 The Sufferation Aesthetic**

Kleinman and Kleinman (1996) in an excellent paper conducted an extensive critique of the commercial appropriation of social suffering through photography. As its point of departure the article displayed and discussed Kevin Carter’s Pulitzer Prize winning photograph (featured in the New York Times) of a vulture lurking behind an emaciated and genuflected child. According to the

authors, “the image’s great success is that it causes the reader to want to know more”. They noted:

The Times’ self congratulatory account fails to adequately evoke the image’s shocking effect...No mother, no family, no one is present to prevent her from being attacked by the vulture, or succumbing to starvation and then being eaten. The image suggests that she has been abandoned. Why? The reader again is led to imagine various scenarios of suffering (1996:4).

Juxtaposed alongside issues surrounding what was happening in the scene and what happened after, the image raises questions about the photographer’s and Western Society’s moral relationship with the dying child. The use of the image firstly as a commercial instrument in selling newspapers and then as an icon of poverty in the appeals of numerous charities made the child in the picture virtually anonymous. The subject became poverty and pain in Africa generally and the story of the girl was almost non-existent. These appropriations, according to Kleinman and Kleinman, may have served to remake, thin out, and distort understandings of suffering when in fact the means and modes by which people suffer have been shown to be greatly diverse. They contend that “witnessing can do good but they do best when they take into account the complexity of local situations” (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996:8). Therefore, the processes involved in acquiring images of the vulnerable cannot be ethically isolated from the ways in which they will be displayed and consumed. Research utilising images of suffering of whatever nature, must try to critically reflect on the possibilities of causing harm and find ways of mitigating the potentially exploitative aspects of photography.

The photographs in this research, as part of an academic endeavour will be used in various ways in furtherance of argumentation and propositions on the relations of deprivation and on the experiencing of ‘sufferation’. The self-directed nature of the process and the contextualisation of

the images (in analysis and discussion) are primarily important in the attempt to use photography as a non-exploitative method of 'interactive self-expression'. One of the most interesting aspects of the pictures *given* is that some of the most obvious images of extreme deprivation in Windsor were not chosen as subjects by the participants. This in some ways flew in the face of the intent of the exercise, but in another way it confirmed the gap between self-representation and researcher desires. Yet, the fact that there are very few representations of stereotypical images of 'poverty' does not mean that the photographers did not appeal to a *sufferation aesthetic*. Indeed, many of the pictures collected were in one way or another, commentaries on social suffering. Many of these emitted a sense of hardship not in the extremes that existed in the community but in their daily interactions – again drawing reflecting the idea of 'going through'. It is here that the titles intervened in affective ways to extract emotions from otherwise innocuous images. For example, personal feelings and emotions were transmitted into the labels such as: *Some Poor Little Beggar Children* (Tango), *Shops Closing Down Because No Money Here* (Bones) and *The Only Job My Sister Can Get* (Singer). As communicative tools in and of themselves, many of the pictures evoked strong reactions from the participants through the intimate resonances captured in the images.

Another dimension of this aesthetic may be discerned from images which provide glimpses of some of the 'everyday' hardships faced by inhabitants of Windsor. These images did not necessarily depict scenes of individuals suffering which tend to be extremely affective. Often the emotive impression made was effected through the questions raised and thoughts evoked by the images (and text). As such, photographs may act as an appeal to the imagination and force a mental picturing of what it would be like to confront and live with certain deprivations. This is exemplified in Sean's picture of, *The Part of the River Where We Clean Our Shoes to Go Bay*, which is one of a series of three photographs on how various parts of the river are used as water

sources. It sits alongside, *Part of the River Where We Can Get Drinking Water* and *Part of the River Where We Have to Go to Wash and Bathe Sometimes*.

**Photo 7:7 The “Sufferation Aesthetic” as Appealed to by Sean**



Each label says something about the struggle for water in Windsor and collectively they represent a part of Sean’s intrigue with the type and quality of the services and facilities available in the community. But the third is the most striking because of the wording of the title. The use of the words ‘have to’ in the label, breaks up the choice element that may have been deduced from the other two titles and imposes a kind of compulsion that speaks to the deprivation (at least in terms of water) that afflicts this area. The image itself leads to questions such as: why are there times



when they 'have to' bathe and wash in this kind of place? How exactly does one bathe in that tiny crevice? Are these practices hygienic? What must it feel like to 'have to' use this space?

### **7.4.3 Afterword on Theoretical Diversity in Photographic Practice**

Ruminating on the provenance of a picture of a man that she found on the pavement, Gumpert (1997) asked: did it fall out of a mother's purse or girlfriend's pocket? Has the man died, or does he live far away? She in the end concluded:

Like all snapshots, this picture has captured a moment of life, a time and place, fixing that instant and condensing it. Now set adrift, the image takes on a life of its own, a new life apart from the one it had faithfully recorded (1997:11).

The photographs discussed in this study have no such contextual autonomy. They are instances in the peripatetic imaging of Windsor as delivered by a specific set of young residents. The intersection of the 'conventions of valuing' and 'conventions of picture taking' serves to historicise the images and to give them an identity. Whereas individual theories separate each participant's montage, their common background as 'commissioned' images unites and gives them a common purpose. Because of the procedures used in the research, for any or all of the photographs it is possible to determine: who took these pictures; where they were taken; and why and on whose behalf. On one hand, the photographs have a past as: (a) results of a request from a researcher; (b) products of the photographers' efforts to answer a question; and (c) scenes, objects or interactions that are areas of interest for their photographers. On the other, they have a cemented future as research variables to be observed, analysed, arranged, displayed and consumed.

Having already detailed the intricacies of the processes employed, there is no possibility of limiting the meaning in any of the pictures to the image itself and of "keeping meaning safe from

context” (Baetens, 2007:54). Yet, the convergences in contextual meaning do not contribute to the formation of a single discourse on experiences in Windsor. On the contrary, understandings of ‘being-in-the-world’ are uneven and diverse, and as such the myriad conceptualisations and photographic practices have produced distinct approaches to experiential depiction. In delineating the differences in photographic practice (such as aspect choices or labelling nuances) and outlining various features of the data (such as the different aesthetics) an attempt has been made to use representative examples of the *modus operandi* of one participant, Sean, while comparing and contrasting with the methods of others. This was so as to produce a trail of evidence leading to a conclusive determination of the particular theoretical route that was travelled (the same could have been done for any of the other participants, but Sean’s was the clearest).

Sean’s unique theory of living in Windsor was presented as generated from: (i) his conventions of picture taking; (ii) the images themselves; (iii) his labelling of those images; and (iv) importantly also, my prior knowledge of him which must have influenced my analytical techniques in relation to his pictures. Examining Sean’s pictures and taking the specifics of the three features into account indicated that he experienced his community as a marginalised space where people are thought of and treated as outcasts. The pieces selected from Sean’s oeuvre are a tragic depiction of material and social deprivation. His single photo of the *State of Houses in Windsor* stands as an exemplification of the standard of housing in the community in general and even his positive commentary on productivity (*Trying Youths*) is aimed at correcting the virulent imaginary that constructs youths from the locality as lazy and nefarious. The identifiable conventions deployed (as through both labels and image) were not necessarily planned to operate the way they did. It is unlikely that Sean (or any other participant) tactically explored the community with the intention of generating specific aesthetic effects within a set narrative strategy. The fact that the ‘ordinary’, the ‘critical’ and ‘sufferation’ often overlap in the same images reveals the unevenness in the

process. However, Sean was asked to depict what living in Windsor was like and from the pictures he presented on collection, it was immediately clear that he not only took the exercise seriously but that he also had a clear and consistent point of view amidst a wide range of topics captured and the varying conventions he practiced (he had the most subjects and the most pictures). The analysis conducted on the 20 pictures he took enabled the identification of a specific *marginalisation perspective* in Sean's photography. This stands as one alongside eight different *theories of living in Windsor* offered by the participants.

### **7.5. Seeing, Doing and Being in Windsor: Three Photo-Essays**

Perhaps the most inviting aspect of autophotography is that it provides an opportunity to the researcher to step outside the commanding position usually held within spoken and written discourse and to become entangled in a very different method of communication. Participants in research are used to being asked questions (e.g. "what is living in Windsor like?") and yet in this case, they were not asked to simply reply verbally, but to traverse their surroundings, reflect on their lives and present a pictorial narrative (of course supplemented with words). Additionally, apart from the researcher-participant relationship which acts to establish certain codes of practice, there was no control over the subjects that could be pictured by the photographers. Worth (1981:184) adamantly maintained that a semiotic of pictures "must begin to describe the structures by which visual communication in its many codes and modes, presents its own unique dialogue with the world". To this effect, once the pictures had been collected, the challenge became one of finding ways of analysing and then transmitting the lessons learned in a manner that recognises the distinctiveness of visual communication while working within a traditional framework (*i.e.* the written language of this thesis).

Boltanski noted of his work that “in most of my pieces I have manipulated the quality of evidence that people assign to photography, in order to subvert it, or to show that photography lies” (Boltanski & Renard, 1994:176). In contrast to Boltanski’s pessimism, Worth (1981) convincingly demonstrated, not that photographs lie or show the truth, but that “the way that pictures mean differs from the way such things as ‘words’ or ‘languages’ mean”. In this chapter, photographs have been conceived of as bearing different messages about ways of being-in-the-world. The images have not been displayed as ‘evidence of existence’ for particular poverty *reality*. The previous sections outlined how picture-taking strategies may be recognised as approaches to viewing the world and described the *aesthetics* as generated from the interaction between labels and images. This section explores a second level of signification by presenting the participants’ *stories* about the mundanities of impoverishment as ‘provoked’ by their own pictures.

The research had been designed such that after labelling their photographs, the participants would go through the pictures and explain how each related to their experience of living in Windsor with the question: *what does this picture show/say?* There were two significant deviations from the process that was designed for the review sessions. Firstly, after the labelling process had ended, because there were numerous cases of multiple aspects of the same subject, related pictures were displayed together for explanations (partly for time constraints and partly to avoid repetition). Secondly, quite often when explaining what the picture showed about their experiences many participants diverged into short anecdotes or lengthy tales which would only loosely be relevant to the specific subject pictured. Thus, while the desire was to have the ‘labels of’ directly interlocked with the ‘meanings for’ the various subjects, this monistic interpretive outlook was overturned by the participants’ storytelling digressions. As problematic as

that was for analysis, it forced a confrontation with the fact that pictures were not reflections of truth or reality, and it demanded the development of analytical techniques to demonstrate this. More importantly, it exposed (if only partially and intermittently) the notoriously elusive *liminal* space – the level of living and experiencing that is a part of everyday routines, and so ordinary as to become almost unrecognisable.

Not every photograph or subject inspired a story/stories and not every participant digressed when interpreting their pictures. Unsurprisingly, some participants were much more disposed to conveying 'storied' significations than others. The photographs presented here are pulled together by their common themes, as opposed to being organised based on their photographers and the display method follows the pattern employed during the photo review sessions. In this way, the targeted subject, rather than the individual pictures were (and are) the focus of analysis. Some of the most profound photos and their interpretations have been combined to constitute three separate thematic photo-essays each prefaced and postscripted by discussions on experiences of deprivation.

Before going any further, it must be declared that while the accounts depicted below were chiefly participant generated, there were instances of clarification and prompting which have been erased so as to present a narrative. Like the interview data, they are therefore to be read as *co-produced stories*.

### **7.5.1 Photo-Essay I**

#### ***Seeing Poverty: Certificates of Presence***

There was an expectation that self-directed picture-taking would contribute at least some photographic representations relevant to the relations of deprivation discovered through the interviews and observations (discussed in previous chapters). This was a reliance on the truth of pictures analogous to Barthes' (2000:87) claims that "every photograph is a certificate of presence". If impoverishment is relational, as has been consistently proposed throughout this study, then pictorial certifications of some of the relations that cultivate and sustain deprivation would inevitably be captured. There were in fact, a number of pictures and explanations that engaged with the social roots of impoverishment. However, in some of these cases not only was there mention of these relations, but the 'stories' transcended what was 'captured' or what could have been predicted as relevant to the poverty debate. The participants saw and pointed out in their images, an everyday type of suffering that was not necessarily obvious to the 'naked eye'.

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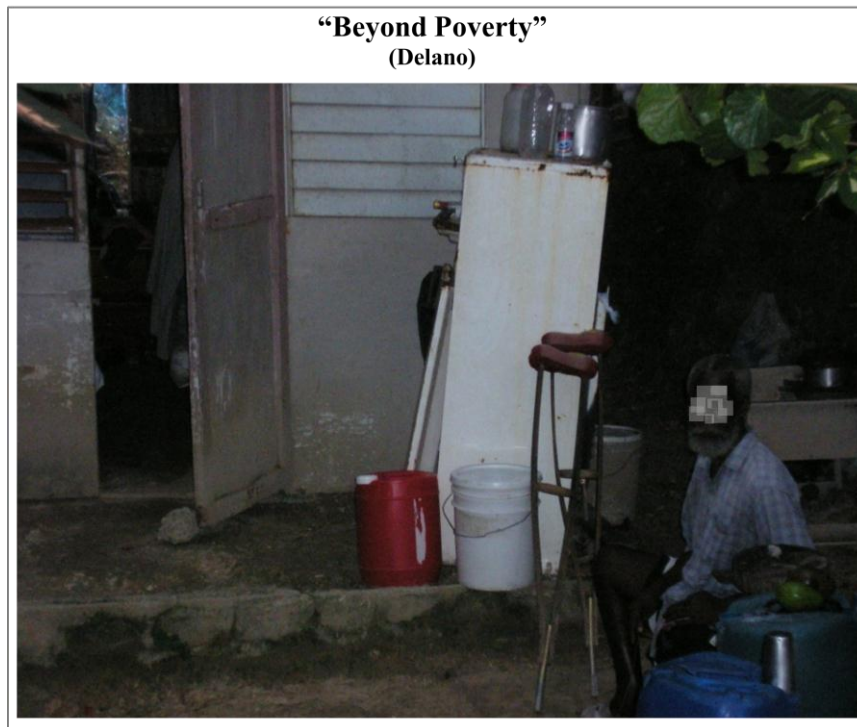
**Photo 7:8 What Delano Sees in Marcus Garvey's Statue**



Marcus Garvey was a great leader for Jamaica. If more youths would take his advice they would be better. I am sure that 95% of the people who live in Windsor don't have no knowledge about Garvey. They walk pass the statue every single day, to come and go and they know the name but they can't say who him is. I feel that the biggest reason they don't know about him is cause life too rough for them. They even did learn it at school, but when you hungry you can't learn nothing. Plus your friends and your family don't care about Garvey because all they care about is how they going to find dinner.

So when they see it they know is Garvey statue, but they don't know what he do for black people and them not going to find out neither. The worse thing is that, is poverty Garvey was fighting against same way. But people don't really think about what Garvey say when hungry biting them left, right and centre, you understand. Is everyman for himself. We live right in front of him and we can't come together and uplift ourself, so when I look at it him I just feel like we going to go on suffering up there (Photo Review Transcript #7).

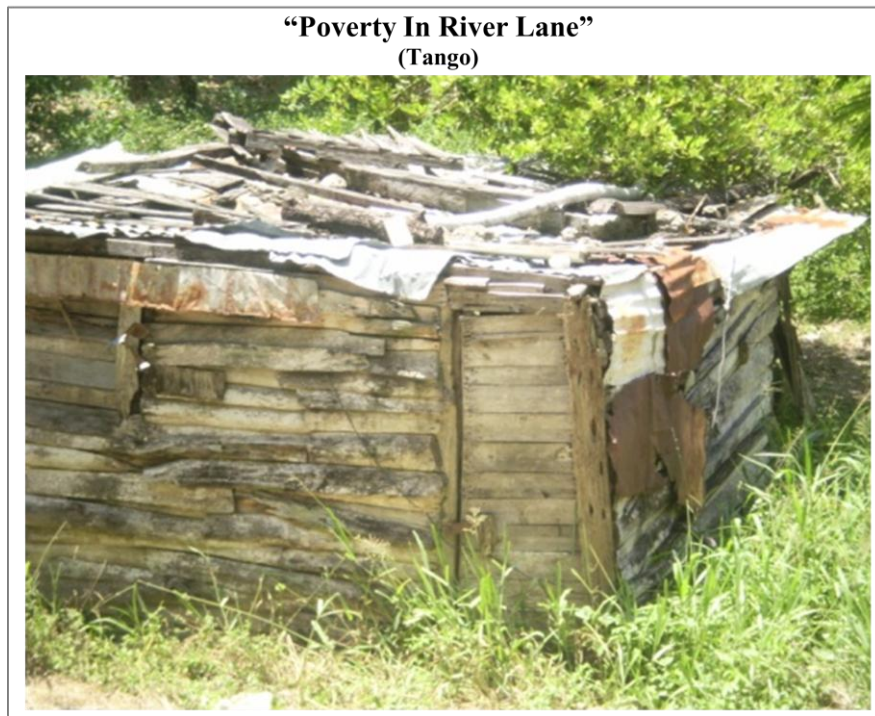
**Photo 7:9 What Delano Sees as Beyond Poverty**



Mr. T well, well beyond poverty. You know that many people in poverty up here, but you can't even imagine what him have to go through. Loads of people can't find it, but when you live alone and you disable you can imagine. Him don't have a pipe and him short of everything. People can't just leave him to live like that. Some government people have to come and give him some help. He don't have no water, He don't have no real bathroom, he don't have no light. Him have a son who come around and help and give him things when him have it. but when him son not there, him have a big problem cause him can't do things for himself and him don't have nobody else to help him. I not even talking about food and clothes and those things because is many people go without that, but at least they can get up and go try or even go look something to beg. Everyday all him can do is just sit down right there where you see him and pray that somebody have pity on him. I sorry for him (Photo Review Transcript #7).



**Photo 7:10 What Tango Sees in a Board House**



Two people live in this house and you can see that this is not no good place for people to live in. This house is around River Lane and this is the poorest part of Windsor. Is mostly board house you see all over Windsor cause the whole of we poor, but in River Lane things worse. People can't find work and they don't have nowhere to go so they just scrape together what they can find and throw up something to live in. Is a sticky situation though because we live in a hurricane country and only God know how they make it out because it was two big one hit the other day. Some strong house blow down and this one stand up same way [laugh]. Yeah, even in some rich people place them big house blow down and this zinc and wood stand up like nothing never happen. One thing I can tell you, if breeze even blow down their house today and they don't dead, if you come back next week you going to see the same thing again right where you see it now. Many, many "batter-bruise" these people get and what you looking at is how sufferer people up here live (Photo Review Transcript #1).

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Much of the poverty spoken of by the photographers, that is, much of what they attempted to communicate through explanations/stories, exists in relations outside or hidden behind the images themselves. The pictures, *Poverty in Windsor Lane* and *Beyond Poverty* gave visual impressions of their subject (poverty) and yet, in the descriptions, neither the concept of poverty nor the images were capable of fully encompassing the enormity of suffering being signified: “you can’t imagine what him have to go through” (Delano); “in River Lane things worse” (Tango). The visible signs of deprivation in the related photographs, stand in contrast to the other apparently benign image where (without knowledge of the context) it would be necessary to ask: how does a statue of Marcus Garvey say to Delano: “we going to go on suffering up here”? Can this image really *show* anything at all about impoverishment? Is it not just an imaginary certificate with meanings grafted on to it?

In examining the photographs and searching for signs of poverty, it is easy to see and therefore easy to concentrate on the figures, the lines and the contours without looking beyond appearances. Lefebvre (1991) noted that a thorough critical analysis of the image of a house would uncover that its famed concreteness and immobility was in fact permeated by streams of energy from every direction including, water, gas, telephone lines, electricity, and signals. Its independence and solidarity is just a guise. He contends that this interpretation is more accurate than any photograph because it reads into the structure’s invisible convergence of waves and currents. Such a reading discloses the fact that “this piece of ‘immovable property’ is actually a two faced machine analogous to an active body” (1991:93). What pictures show, or what may be observed – whether physical structures or relations – is constituted of multiple, though not necessarily easily observable social transactions, all of which are meaning-laden. Lefebvre (1991:92) argues that it is entirely possible to conceal the presence of meaningful content, by means of either an ‘absence of meaning’ or an ‘overload of meaning’. Inasmuch as

preconceptions and foreknowledge have obstinately entrenched the 'poor old man' or the 'wooden shack' within certain interpretive domains (in terms of seeing and evaluating 'poverty' in the images), the 'statue of Garvey' is interpretively denuded due to its ubiquity and the everydayness (which in turn confers vacuity in meaning).

Yet, in the exegesis of these photographs, the participants read into (or out of) the images, currents and waves of everyday suffering: (a) "people can't think about Garvey when hungry biting them left, right and centre" (Delano); (b) "all he can do is sit down and pray somebody have pity on him" (Sean); (c) "many, many batter-bruise these people get" (Tango). These significations and the other messages of poverty that have been found in the pictures above, fatally fracture the linear modalities that construct photographs as 'certificates of presence'. The participants unwittingly, but radically tore down the order of practice in this examination of impoverishment. The method was designed to facilitate an explanation on what was visible in their photographs and what relations they indicated. Instead, the participants expanded the possibilities of images – moving them away from being reflections of reality and towards being signifiers of latent/hidden experiences of everyday suffering.

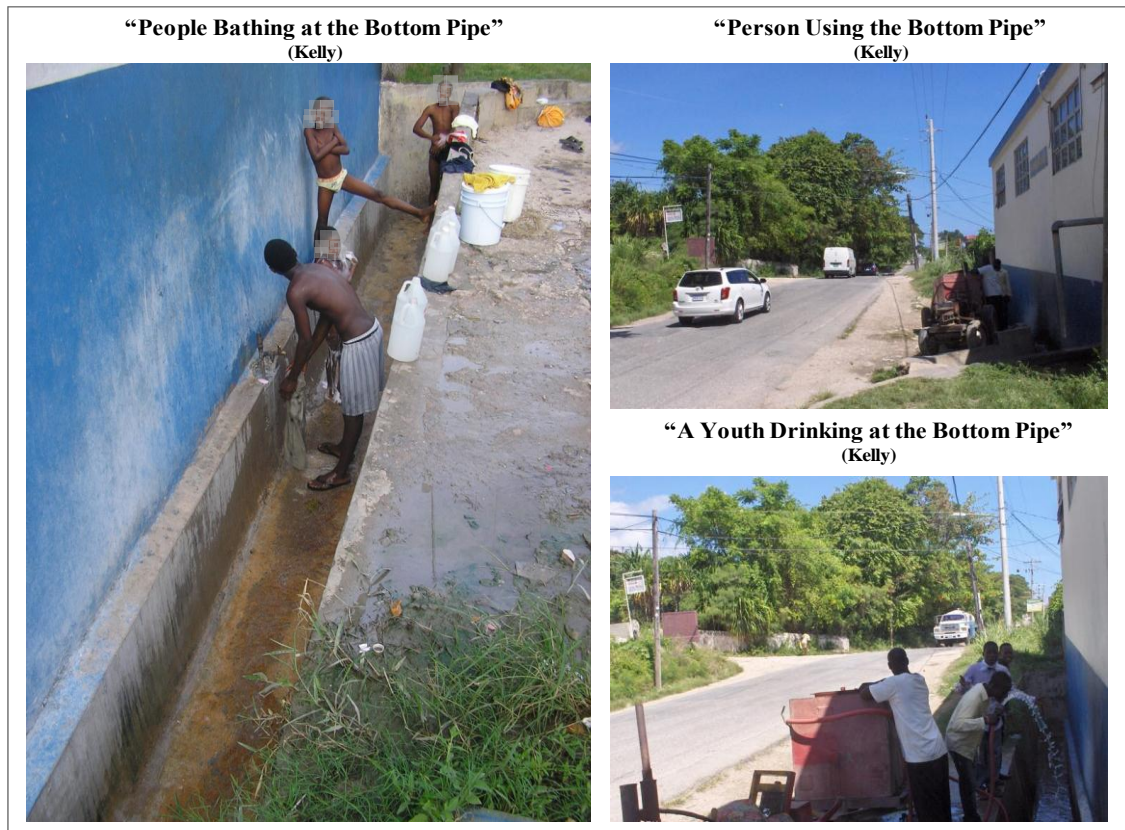
### 7.5.2 Photo-Essay II

#### ***Doing* Hardship in Windsor: Bathing, Walking, Fetching...**

The autophotographic dimension of the research was structured around a group of youths taking pictures *showing what living in Windsor is like*. Though there was a strong sense that 'living' would have a variety of interpretations and a presumption that daily routines would be one of its pictured features, there was no contemplation of the form these activities would take or the significance that would be attached to them. It was expected that interesting images of the physical infrastructure might have been captured which would depict the sufferation and hardships they symbolised. Yet, there was an extension of this logic in a number of the photographs. In particular, they contained accounts of a sort of numbing anguish that was indelibly etched onto the intricacies of the what, why and the ways that people *do*. Suffering was shown to be immanent in the minutia of doing. This recognition compelled a consideration of whether processes, structures, relations or conditions were the only constituents of poverty and impoverishment. Is the perfunctory practicing of everyday life not the immediate effecting or actualising of the oft discussed experiences of hardship? If so, are these *doings* not fundamental to the essence of any conceptualisation of poverty?

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**Photo 7:11 The Practice of Bathing and Using the Pipe**



Because we don't have our own pipe in our yard and the top pipe too far for people who live down this side, people use this pipe and get water here. Most of the little kids don't bother carry up the water, they just bathe right there. Some of them can't carry up the water anyway because it too heavy for them so their parent just send them to go bathe instead of catching water. Up here whole heap of people just bathe right in the open, it don't matter if people passing, car passing or what. They use to it because when water gone, man, woman and child have to bathe in the river and people walk pass there same way. Who shy just keep on some of their clothes or squeeze-up in a corner. Bathing up here just different from other place because we don't have what they have. Some people up here don't even have no toilet in their yard, them don't have time to wonder about people watching them. That is the least thing bothering them.

It dangerous for the kids down this pipe though because some of them don't even know how to cross road and so the pipe shouldn't be all the way over there, they should put another pipe inside of the community before one day one of the kids them dead. You know how taxi man drive mad on the road and one day something going to hit one of them. Many times some of them nearly dead when they come bathe, so they shouldn't even come down here by themselves (Photo Review Transcript #4).



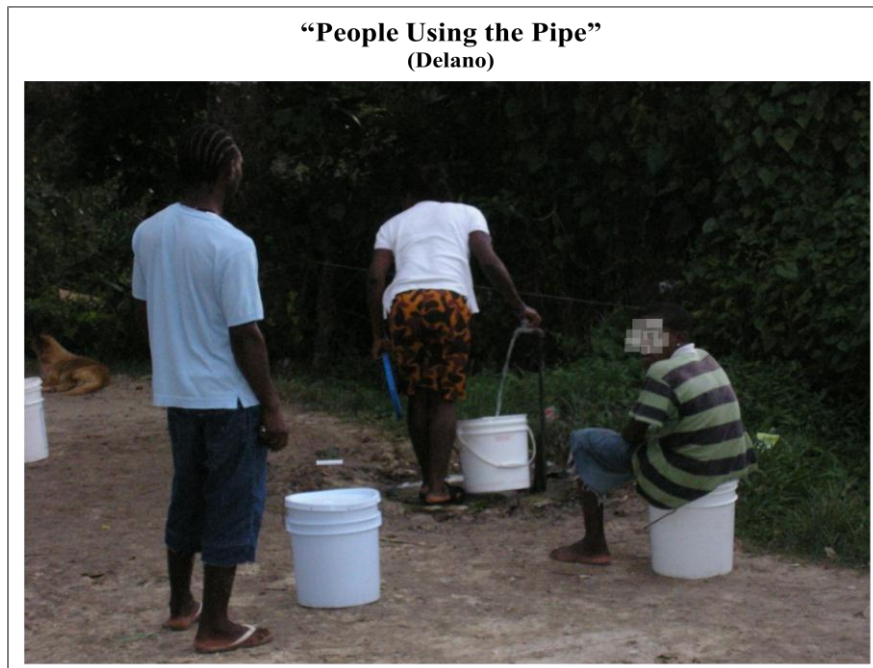
### Photo 7:12 The Practice of Walking



When rain fall in Windsor people shoes bury under mud because the road is just dirt and marl. We don't have it easy at all. You see when the kids to go school, their mother have to walk with them go down to the main road and lead them out and it is either they carry one extra pair of shoes or they carry a rag to clean the kids shoes when they reach main road.

Next thing too is that it well slippery, that's why the parents them have to follow the kids them too and hold their hand or else as they step outside their door they drop. Windsor people biggest cry is: "We want road". Is either road or water. And don't even talk about night time in this place because to walk a day is so much buck-toe [hit toes against stones] and drop, night ten times worse than day. People have to make sure they walk with their phone to shine light on the road so they can dodge big stone and pothole. You have one drunken' [drunkard] brethren that live round here, only him I know can handle the dark. Even when him frass [drunk], him know where the every pothole is and him know where slippery and where the big stone is. I don't know how him do it, him is the only one walk at night and never drop yet. The rest of we better make sure we have phone or flashlight (Photo Review Transcript #6).

**Photo 7:13 The Practice of Fetching Water**



You can only see three people there at the pipe waiting for water now, but is really four people there and everybody only have one bucket. This is a good day because it look like the water running hard too. This water usually run very, very slow and we only have the one pipe to serve all of the top side, from up there go right back down to Girls' Home side. Some times you see even 50 people out here no lie.

Alright let me tell you one joke. Not because I say is a joke don't mean you not to take me serious because is true, true, real thing. The other day, about 50 people or even more than that was waiting and people filling even 3 or 4 bucket. So you know that cursing and warring going on plus the water running slow, slow [laugh]. So me was at about half way, round 30 people get before me and then I get mine and go home. When I come back out, is the last somebody don't get water yet. Trust me as he put the bucket under the pipe, the water just trickle out and water gone [laugh]. He start to kick the pipe, but water gone, gone, gone [laugh]. I laugh till me nearly dead. Water gone all the time, but is like it just plan to fix him that day [laugh].

All joking aside though, they supposed to give water to yard that can afford it because it well rough to be filling one bucket and then little later one next bucket, and then one next one again, everyday like that. Carrying bucket and bucket of heavy water every minute is not a nice thing. Some people even live up some wicked hill, is hard work man. It killing we to go on like that everyday, so they need to come and run water in people yard (Photo Review Transcript #7).

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Within different the research methods employed in this study, several residents have been asked and have responded to the question: *why do you say you are poor?* There have been diverse answers ranging from “because I don’t have no opportunity to be rich” (Prento, Interview Transcript #21), to “because I don’t have a house for myself” (Auntie Nez, Interview Transcript #7).<sup>61</sup> Individuals across varying settings have pointed to social structures, to the fact that life is difficult, or to different types of material deprivations, and although there have been many anecdotal examples of struggles, no one has directly identified their ‘poverty’ in the punishing and often humiliating routines which suture time and space into their *living* of sufferation.

A multiplicity of intensely enervative practices becomes a way of life in contexts of deprivation. These disparate activities which comprise the everyday coalesce into oppressive burdens that bear down on individuals, families and communities and come to be masked by and generalised under the umbrella terms such as hardship, difficulty or suffering. It is necessary to ask: in the context of research on impoverishment what meaning should be given to children having to cross a busy and dangerous main road so as to bathe? It may be that the unavoidability and frequency of the afflictions involved in going about life have diluted the salience of calamities and transformed the traumatic into a sort of tragic normality. These details of everyday activities and practices are usually unrecorded (even where they are not unseen) in poverty research. Maybe they are too ordinary, too banal and therefore, too uninteresting.

The ‘cry’ of the inhabitants of Windsor tends to be, ‘we need road’ or ‘we need water’. Poverty research and discourses typically follow a similar pattern (or shape it), by concentrating on the presence or absence of resources, conditions and interactions without examining the actual

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 5 for a discussion on the focus group sessions and interviews alluded to.



unfolding of events or actions which constitute *living* or *doing* in deprivation. Yet, the constant “buck-toe” and falling when walking or struggling up hills with “bucket and bucket of heavy water” give substance and potency to yearnings for better and to the ‘structures of feeling’ built up around perceived needs.

It is important in many ways to begin using poverty in examining exactly how ‘hard life’ is lived, or in other words, to break into and expose the intricacies of everyday sufferation. Currently there is an emphasis in research on the nature, extent and implications of deprivations and/or on the complex structures and relations that enable them. For example, in assessments of access to water, it might be conventionally deemed sufficient to elaborate on a number of issues including, how many potable sources are available, how individuals feel about it, or why there are no efforts at governmental level to improve access to the resource. However, the details of how “shy” persons hide behind trees or “squeeze-up in a corner” to avoid being visible when bathing in the river would be superfluous in most explanations of impoverishment. These practices may seem to be inconsequential or peripheral. Yet, the humiliation felt about their constant ‘exposure’ may in fact assist in explaining why many individuals in Windsor value gaining access to private piped water over employment. Even when externally imposed rationality would suggest that a regular income may lead to greater and faster improvements in life circumstances.

Finally, people constantly manoeuvre around and within the deprivations they live. As a result, it is not always appropriate to conceptualise the things that people *do* in terms of ‘strategising’. Often, in their choices, individuals are reacting to systems of power, or situations of crisis and indeed people’s “actions cannot simply be read off from their situations” (Francis, 2002:544). The activities described above are not presented as authoritative accounts of how deprivation is lived,

not least because living deprivation seems to require constant negotiation and adaptation. Nevertheless, attempts to understand impoverishment might benefit from paying attention to those filaments that bind together the living and experiencing of social suffering. Inasmuch as relations, structures or conditions may be integral to *poverty as a concept*, the way people do what they have to do, may provide the substance of *poverty as an experience*.

### 7.5.3 Photo-Essay III

#### ***Being in the Margins: Alterity and Everyday Existence in Windsor***

Bell Hooks (1991:149) posited that “to be in the margin is to be a part of the whole but outside the main body”. She recalls that:

As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railway tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could only work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town (1991:149).

Many of the photographs taken of Windsor elicited from participants similarly profound tales of otherness. Some of the scenes they captured bore the signs of deprivation, and more than that, they represented spaces which carried connotations of everyday existence in *difference*. Being marginal and being in the margin is a kind of intermediacy – a straddling of two worlds, existing in and experiencing both, but belonging only to that unwanted part which has been reserved for the unwanted. The images were made to depict some of what this existence means for the youths who live in alterity.

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**Photo 7:14 Being a Light Thief**



Most people in Windsor have thieving light and some people go jail for it. The other day is eight people them come and lock up around here for it, one other time four people they lock up. That is how they do it, lock up people and say that they are thief, but is wickedness that because life rough round here and we can't afford certain things. So even if they want to come and take their light, that is how it go, but they don't have to throw people in jail for it.

You see because we are some squatter people they can do anything they want to we. You have some big man down Bay who don't pay no light bill and some other big man all around the place that thief light same like we. Is not we alone, but is we they locking up though. All they do to their friend is tell them to take it down or they charge them a 'smalls' [a small amount]. So why anytime they come up here they want throw people straight in prison? But people wise still and we know when they coming so we just roll it in (Photo Review Transcript #3).

**Photo 7:15 Being Without Good Roads**



The road too bad, it is one of the worse things in the community. If somebody sick they can't leave because no taxi man not coming up here for them and it worse if rain fall because they can't leave none at all. No matter how many time they say they going to come and fix it, is only lie. People up here must did do something to them, that they can't just help we out with the road.

Is the road why you see we can't even carry our friends and so come up here because they take one look on it and say: "who? Me not going up there with you". We shame to carry people up here. So we beg them please to do something about it because it only getting worse. But we not getting no answer (Photo Review Transcript #2).

**Photo 7:16 The Marginality of Roads in Windsor**



As you turn off the main road is a big difference to come into Windsor. This first picture show that from the beginning of Windsor road is bad, but the main road is excellent. Our road only destroy people vehicle. The second one show a big difference again in the road condition as you leave Marley to come into Windsor.

You can look on the two entrance to Windsor and see that Windsor is not a scheme [an official housing scheme]. You don't even have to exact touch Windsor before the road start get bad so that mean to say that people not to go there. You see it? They could even say, allow the front part that meet the main road to get a little touch of the tar, but not even that they can't waste on Windsor. They have it to say we don't good so they just making sure that everybody know. Those things not right and is not care we don't care, we want to do something about it and every now and again we try a thing to fix it, but we don't have it (Photo Review Transcript #8).

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The subjects represented in the photographs above were spoken of passionately by the participants. They seemed more than simply depictions of community domains, things or individuals, but aspects of their own lives. This is understandable since the images and commentaries relayed messages about their everyday perceptions and experiences. Can these things/scenes be thought of as *belonging* to those who interact within and occupy them? And if so, what do they say about the photographers who took and interpreted them? The issue of identity raised has been explored by Boltanski, who, upon reading of the death of an Oxford student, is noted to have written to the university to ask if the personal effects (significant or otherwise) of this person could be sent to him. Once the items were collected, they were organised, photographed and the images become a part of Boltanski's famous *inventaire* series. Perloff writing on this work argued:

The question the inventory poses is whether we can know someone through his or her things. If the clothes make the man, as the adage has it, can we recreate the absent man from these individual items? Or does the subject fragment into a series of metonymic images that might relate to anyone? (1997:47)

The chasm in method and purpose between Boltanski's *Inventory of Objects Belonging to an Inhabitant of Oxford* and the collection of pictures presented above, is so immense that a direct analogy would be facile. Nevertheless, there is one area of concern integral to both – the question of being and identity as expressible through images. Boltanski's objective was a pictorial disputation of whether it was possible to "know someone through his or her things" (Perloff, 1997:47). On the other hand, the small selection of photographs here, engages with what the representation of lived subjects/images can say/show about their *representers*. In this way, both contest not only the politics of photographic representation, but also the politics of meaning (Bolton, 1992:x).

All the images above in some way relate to a kind of everyday *being*, since they are images of the frequent encounters they make or spaces the participants use and inhabit. Boltanski's work is accurate in suggesting that things or pictures of things cannot identify specific individuals, but it is important also to note that such representations may reveal something important about individuals and their lives. Thus, conspicuous in Sean's portrayal of the entrances to *his* community (e.g. the condition of Windsor Road as against the St. Ann's Bay Main Road), is the fact that he occupies a space of difference. If, as Bourdieu (1999a:124) contends, "historical differences" and social realities are often inscribed on the physical world, then it is justifiable to begin thinking about the implications (existential and experiential) for those who must *be* in the margins. Based on the way they were used, the photographs may have illustrated a sort of marginality and differentiation, but it was the photographers who added the tales of *being* alienated: "they can do anything they want with we" (Bones); "people up here must did do something to them, that they just can't help we out" (Singer); "they have it to say that we don't good" (Sean).

The issues raised here are immediately relevant to discourses on poverty because the images and interpretations of *being* in marginality have exposed complex 'identities of alterity' which militate against the possibility of addressing deprivation simply through income or material improvements. A number of questions must be explored: How is *otherness* produced? Can poverty policy be considered as complicit in processes that are actively *othering* people? How should poverty engagements (research and policy) conceive of and deal with individuals and groups who are not only materially deprived, but also see themselves as *other*? Is *being othered* not itself, a type of deprivation that creates and/or exacerbates social suffering?



## 7.6. Conclusion: The Implications of Everydayness for Poverty Studies

This chapter examined various aspects of the practices surrounding the collection and analysis of autophotographic data. It explored the idea that the different approaches to picturing formed individual *theories of living in Windsor* (as informed by Ziller, 1990). There was also an evaluation of the different aesthetics appealed to by the photographers through an assessment of the interaction between the labels and the images. Finally, three photo-essays were presented which bore different stories of *seeing*, *doing* and *being* in deprivation.

The data from the autophotographic exercise described throughout this chapter is both exploratory and experimental. It may also be considered as, in many ways, untamed when compared with the levels of scrutiny applied to the other forms of data gathering used in this research and outlined in previous chapters. For example, it has not been possible to have an exhaustive critical engagement with the politics and ethics of *picturing* and interpreting pictures. This is in part due to the nascence and rarity of autophotography as a tool in social science research. But perhaps this very weakness may make a contribution in opening up new frontiers of contestation in the debate on impoverishment. Speculation, critique, reinterpretations or revisions of the approach and its conclusions may serve to improve the method employed while simultaneously adding to and generating debate on the poverty question which needs wider spaces of interrogation so as to practically connect with the experiences of those described as poor. As explored through the pictorial data presented above, *everyday living* may be one potential site of disputation that may act to nuance resolved beliefs on the relations of deprivation. Below some of the implications of this work for poverty research are considered.

### **7.6.1 Looking Backward (at Gaps/Errors) and also Forward (at Lessons to be Learned)**

Is it practical for this kind of data, which is notoriously repellent to the imposition of causality and which can be considered as no 'more than metaphors', to be given serious and sustained academic audience? As I conducted fieldwork over a nine month period in Windsor, I 'observed' the residents in their daily routines and often I interacted with them while they were doing various dolorific activities (including some of those discussed in the images above), but I did not really 'see' what was transpiring. I thought about and sought answers on the relations and structures that created and exacerbated these experiences, and on the ways in which they could be counteracted, yet, I did not ask about what was being done (it was after all being observed). Nor did I enquire about the substance (emotional and physical) of these practices (were they painful, tiring, humiliating?). The concerns about what was happening were subsumed under generalities such as the 'hardship of living without any reliable supply of potable water'. Though I had already been aware of intangibles and 'structures of feelings' around certain things (most significant in this was Singer's lamentation referred to in the introduction to this chapter), I was perplexed by them. It was not until the autophotographic exercise had been completed that I was able to recognise the importance of the minutia of experiencing. This awakening led to the search for and discovery of excellent works such as, de Certeau's (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and Augoyard's (2007) *Step by Step*, and these enabled the development of the conceptual tools to appreciate and explicate everyday practices in the collected pictorial data even though the fieldwork period was at an end.

Researchers enter the field laden with expectations (and hopes), but also they are almost always completely subordinate to their ideological dispositions. Indeed, their scientific, social and philosophical traditions conspire to create frames of reference which "shift the definitions of what

is acceptable in the study of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:414). Academics, therefore, possess their own ways of being in and seeing the world. The problem arising from this is that it is difficult to realise that ways of seeing are also ways of not seeing. In my case, the minute details of what was visibly (and at the same time imperceptibly) occurring in day-to-day doings were too numerous, too random and too different to be considered important to elucidating the relations of deprivation. Jodha (1988:2421) has outlined, in four stages, the inanity of this kind of thinking in poverty research. It was a mode of thought I thought I was avoiding, but in many ways I was enslaved to it:

The fallacy:

- (i) The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured: This is ok as far as it goes.
- (ii) The second step is to disregard that which cannot be measured or give it an arbitrary quantitative value: This is artificial and misleading.
- (iii) The third step is to presume that what cannot be measured easily is not important: This is blindness.
- (iv) The fourth step is to say that what cannot be easily measured really does not exist: This is suicide.

Though the everyday cannot be easily digested through conventional academic practice, it would be deleterious to dismiss them on this basis since they may be integral to acquiring better understandings of the relations of deprivation. It is therefore expedient to begin considering ways to access this ‘compartment’ of the lived.

What then are the implications for research on poverty? Coming to grips with the everyday may be messy, inchoate and immensely problematic but they may potentially contain “folktales providing a panoply of schemas for action” (de Certeau, 1984:70). By investigating the

manoeuvres in doing, it becomes possible to understand how the individuals in their quotidian and miniscule movements can manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them, if only so as to evade and undermine them (de Certeau, 1984:xiv). In Chapter 6 I commented on the fact that for a lengthy period I struggled to comprehend contradictory statements on poverty in some of the interviews I had conducted. I could not come to terms with how within one interview an individual could define poverty as a lack of income and go on to declare quite belligerently the view that their entire community, irrespective of income, was poor. It was only when a speech turn had been recognised as a deliberate discursive challenge to existing frames of conceptualising poverty, that I finally understood the apparent contradiction as an act of resistance.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, an interviewee, Auntie Nez, carefully negotiated her identity throughout the course of an interview and responded to the context and my status in choosing to present herself as *deserving* of assistance on the basis of being an 'aspirational' rather than an 'absolutely' poor person. Due to the existing discourses surrounding poverty and current poverty reduction policies individuals who struggle to survive must be careful of what they say. Auntie Nez's renegotiation of her identity occurred against this background.<sup>63</sup>

In both these cases it is possible to see how simply in the act/art of speaking individuals were able to overturn and co-opt the rules and laws imposed on them and bend the relations of domination to suit their own purposes. The residents of Windsor are subjects of domination who have been subjected to savage processes of deprivation and as such, they must often submit to relations of power that they have little choice but to accept. These are dispersed through numerous avenues including, governmental programmes of 'aid', social and economic institutions or even the academically constructed terms used to define and interpret their existence.

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter 6, page 211-212.

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 5, page 186-189.

However, those considered poor are not as voiceless and as powerless as some would suggest (e.g. as portrayed in, Narayan *et al*, 1999). In their daily lives and in going about their ordinary routines the poor “must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities” (de Certeau, 1984:xiii). In *doing* then, they often deflect the power of the dominant social order which they are incapable of openly challenging. In this way, “they have escaped it without leaving it” (de Certeau, 1984:xiii). But also, in *doing*, they often bear enormous burdens and pains which are shorn of significance and generalised under characterisations such as ‘struggling through suffering’. Learning about these and other aspects of everyday living experiences may become indispensable in terms of strategising to oppose/expose relations deprivation.

This chapter began by presenting one of the most moving encounters of my entire fieldwork experience – Singer’s reflection on the day he lost his job and how he felt about it. In describing the event he provided an alarming level of detail before stating: “too much things worse ’bout how they deal with me, but the way I did feel was worserah [much more than worst]” (Interview Transcript, #8). In light of the deliberations that have been conducted, it is appropriate that we return to and rephrase the questions emerging from Singer’s ordeal. If, for arguments sake, we were to consider Singer as poor, is there not something of the nature of this phenomenon within the minutia of his practicing/experiencing of the conditions, relations, or structures that have determined and then devastated his livelihood? If this is so why is there not more attention being paid to these admittedly fragmentary and elusive processes?

## **CHAPTER 8**

**Conclusion: *Playing Out* the Complex Relationship Between  
the Poverty Construct and Living Experiences of  
Deprivation**

## 8.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, the dominant poverty construct has been interrogated from a critical perspective which has negotiated and applied conceptual insights borrowed from a wide array of disciplines and theoretical approaches. Two of these chapters (*i.e.* chapters 2 and 4) were envisaged and written as a 'positional composite' that pulled together distinct but inextricable facets of research practice. The first explored *my way of seeing/thinking* the social world as inspired by Bourdieu, Foucault and Williams and the second provided a reflexive gaze into the problematics of my encounters in the field and *my way of doing/representing*. Four other chapters (*i.e.* chapters 3, 5, 6 and 7) were designed as direct 'responses' which engaged the central questions of this thesis. They critically examined in turn: (a) the social history of poverty discourses and definitions in Jamaica; (b) the complexities of accessing poverty knowledge (for participation and wider approaches); (c) some of the issues surrounding the spatial relations of deprivation and their effects in the Windsor context; as well as (d) the different ways in which Windsor youths' perceive their everyday living experiences.

The objective of this concluding chapter is to step back from direct argumentation on the data so as to present a comprehensive review of the varying discussions. It is therefore intended as comprehensive analysis of previous analyses which will provide a frame for the contribution of this study to debates on ways of conceiving of and addressing poverty. The first task here has been to employ the two 'positional chapters' as compasses in navigating the departures and turns of the four distinct 'response chapters'. In this endeavour, the separate discussions are extracted from their attachment to specific inquiries and (re)crafted into a single critical exegesis in reply to the overarching and generative question of this study on the nature of the relationship between

the poverty construct and people's experiences. The structure adopted is that of a storyline in which the plot develops to a *partial* resolution of the major issues of the thesis. The first section ("The Exposition") sets up the context in which the 'research drama' will be played out. Secondly, the pivotal moment in the study ("The Inciting Incident") is described, before a brief explanation of the new direction that was followed is provided in the third section ("Rising Action"). In the fourth section ("The Climax"), there is a delineation of the aims, explanation of how principles were applied and an outline of proposals for the future of poverty research in Jamaica (which may have implications for research elsewhere). Finally, this chapter, and the thesis closes with a commentary ("The Dénouement") on why the 'nature of the relationship in focus (*i.e.* between the dominant poverty construct and the experience of deprivation) has been interpreted as one of *resonance*.

## 8.2. The Exposition: The Background of the Research

There exists a well established, though complex distinction, between poverty and deprivation. Put simply, deprivation refers to generalised and socially structured conditions of lack from which definitions of poverty are carved (see for e.g., Sen, 1979; Townsend, 1987; Bevan & Joireman, 1997; Yapa, 1998). In the Caribbean and beyond there have been incalculable resource and financial investments (by states and international organisations) in rigorously designed and scientifically sophisticated endeavours at alleviation, reduction and/or eradication (see, Arthur, 1995). Yet, the results to date are highly contested with some claiming that the problem is generally being effectively addressed while others contend that conditions are worsening. Amidst all this, there remains an almost unanimous consensus on the fact that too great a poverty



problem exists, whatever its exact proportions (Melville & Wint, 2007; Soares, 2008; also see, Bevan & Joireman, 1997; Lister, 2004).

These propositions, among other things, sparked an interest in critically evaluating the efficacy of the absolute poverty construct (the poverty line and its policy legatees) to conceptualisation, definition and measurement which is predominant (with policymakers and intellectuals) in Jamaica. The main assumption underlying the research was that the orthodox approach to deprivation from which the dominant poverty definition is discursively constructed, is antithetic to many of the objectives declared by its proponents. To the extent that this was correct, it would mean that state-resourced policy and meticulously designed scholarly instruments were inimical to the ambition of eradicating (or even effectively alleviating/reducing) the universally maligned deprivations which give rise to the various forms of social suffering that have been labelled as poverty. To test these postulations it was thought best to identify an autochthonous way of seeing poverty and then compare and contrast its uses, intentions and dimensions with those of the official construct. The existence of an indigenous though complex popular notion of poverty was another key assumption and it was determined that this could be found, extracted and assessed through careful and critical application of participatory methods within a community where extreme deprivation is prevalent and that is inhabited by many who would, by almost any definition, be identified as poor. Indeed, the case study, Windsor, was referred to as a “pocket of poverty” by the governmental agency, the Social Development Commission (2008:74).

This ‘careful and critical’ deployment of participation was envisaged partly as a corrective to the prevailing applications of the method. In Jamaica, there has been a tendency to operate according to the “walking on two legs” model whereby the poverty line-based conceptualisation

and definition of poverty is “complemented by participatory methods which better identify the more subjective dimensions of poverty” (Lister, 2004:47). In this tradition there is almost no capacity for or even consideration of the possibility that preconceived ideas of ‘who is poor/non-poor’ may be in conflict with and may need to dialectically respond to the knowledge of participants (see for e.g., Moser & Holland, 1997; Grant & Shillito, 2002). Thus, who can be defined as poor is the exclusive domain of experts and professionals with the “symbolic power” to “constitute the given by stating it” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:148), whereas those deemed poor, at best, have an opportunity to contribute to understandings of a predetermined and imposed poverty experience.

A reversal of the established modes of participatory conduct was one of the paramount concerns as the residents of the informal community of Windsor were engaged to take part in the study. Four principles would guide the approach and would be allowed to supersede other considerations: (a) insofar as possible allow space for informants’ ‘voices and choices’ to influence outcomes and to direct the flow of interaction within the methods employed; (b) constantly apply critical reflexivity and constantly examine the implications of practice and positionality for respondents and the research; (c) use knowledge gained in highlighting and countering oppression whenever or wherever oppressive forces were identified; and (d) respect the residents’ stories and value movements in their midst as investments and gifts which have a duty of care attached to them (especially in *representations* of the final narrative). The objective was at once, a critique of the reigning poverty construct and an indictment of the participatory approach by means of a reflexive participatory approach which would lead to an alternative (if locally derived) definition. As this entangled plot gradually unfolded and as the central principles were mobilised a number of complex problems emerged. Then, there was a rude awakening to

the existence of crippling antinomies within the underlying epistemological position and the methodological tools that were being employed.

### **8.3. The Inciting Incident: The Impetus for a Research Revolution**

Piqued by occurrences in the seventh interview of the study (with Auntie Nez), there was reconnection with the fact that interviews were occasions for co-construction and meaning-making rather than for the extraction of an unblemished *reality* (Järvinen, 2000). While a reconsideration of how data was to be read was being undertaken, this reflexive process was not made to impact on the nature of the data being sought in the field. However, a major rupture in thought and practice was on the horizon. This fissure emerged in consecutive days over two youth focus group sessions (YFG1 and YFG2) and forced a reassessment of the parameters of the study. Specifically, the incidents necessitated a redesign of the research question and a full reinterpretation of what can be known from dialogical engagements.

The events that transpired in YFG1 had caused considerable bewilderment in that the planned agenda was completed with what appeared to be unusual smoothness and the discussions were particularly amiable. Despite these putative abnormalities, the attribute that inspired an immediate mistrust in the results of the session was the consensus that had emerged around the income/consumption mode of defining poverty. Far from asserting an indigenous notion, the group unanimously expressed views which were almost completely aligned with the dominant construct. It was assumed that orthodox ideas would be held by some, but would be alien to the lived experiences of most persons in the community. Though not taken as conclusive, already

one of the central assertions of the study was in danger. The initial reaction was to cast suspicion on whether these youths were merely responding to the power relations inherent to the research context and conveniently perpetuating “the fantasies and fallacies” of the orthodoxy they thought would be most suitable for the occasion (Chambers, 1995:198). From this encounter, the questions that had to be answered here were: if the accord had been centred on a discordant point of view would they have been treated with the same level of scepticism? If not, then is the basis of validity for perspectives of ‘the poor’ the extent to which they maintain sufficient distance from dominant perspectives and the extent to which they fulfil researcher expectations?

As if there was an elaborate conspiracy to subvert the study, YFG2 would deal an even more devastating blow to the epistemological and methodological pillars upon which the research had been built. The expectation had been that ideas of poverty could be found within the community itself drawing on folk concepts and experiential knowledge. The challenge then was to utilise efficient and innovative tools (borrowed from the literature) to access and capture local views in a manner that would be conducive to analysis, exposition and comparison. As such, there was a pre-planned format that should be roughly followed (though some deviation was anticipated) and carefully drafted tasks and exercises that should be completed with the allotted time. Yet, on the second task which required that distinctions be drawn between different groups of poor people a debate erupted that effectively ruined the predesigned programme. One of the participants exclaimed: “no matter what you have or don’t have, anybody that live in Windsor must poor!” This declaration illustrated that for all the vituperation thrown at conventional participatory practice it was extremely difficult to circumvent the pitfalls occasioned by researcher preconceptions. In particular, the outburst had exposed the fact that assumptions which act upon (and often constrain) the possibilities of knowledge underlie every methodology and technique. The focus

group, like the interview, was not simply a forum for *finding* indigenous ideas and concepts; instead, it was a means of active knowledge *co-construction*.

There was much disagreement with the assertion that everyone in Windsor was poor and there was clearly an appetite for a debate on this issue. A decision had to be made because on the one hand there was a set of tasks that, if completed, should produce the kind of ideographic data that was being sought after in an academically digestible format (e.g. in the task worksheets). This might have been the ideal context, since, as opposed to YFG1, this group was displaying a rich diversity of views. On the other hand, there was a commitment to allow space for the participants' 'voices and choices' to influence the research. In the end, the decision was taken to leave the forum 'open' for the discussion and this proved to be the decisive moment in the field – the moment which initiated and compelled the formulation of a new research enterprise. From the discussion which ensued, it was found that there were at least three fundamentally different definitions of poverty operating in YFG2. These definitions were related to and drew on the varying discourses surrounding poverty that existed in Windsor. The irrevocably protean and polysemous nature of poverty was beginning to emerge. This rendered the search for an indigenous way of seeing futile if arriving at such an artefact was to avoid operating many of the fallacies that constituted the dominant approach such as: (a) silencing those voices that were in deemed unsuitable (e.g. because they mirrored dominant ideas); (b) essentialising a quixotic notion of community; or (c) refusing to allow critical engagement between preconceptions and local views. Some extremely difficult questions had to be addressed: if not by means of critical evaluation against a locally generated alternative, how then was the prevailing poverty construct to be effectively assessed? What kind of opposition could now be formed against the social relations that sustain deprivation? How would the data for such an opposition be collected? And, how should co-constructed experiential knowledge be interpreted and represented?

## **8.4. Rising Action: New Contours and Directions**

The research had been immobilised by the coincidental encounter between critically reflexive practice and some of the “limits of reflexion” (Bourdieu, 1985:86). To engineer an escape from this imbroglio, both the underlying assumptions and the fundamental questions of the research had to be confronted and reevaluated. There remained at the centre of the study a belief that, in the way it was currently conceived and promulgated, the dominant approach to poverty in Jamaica was in some ways detrimental to the reduction or elimination of connoted social suffering. Nevertheless, this proposition was divorced from association with previously held assumptions that: (a) individuals or groups had fixed and identifiable (even if complex) and autonomous alternative conceptualisations of poverty; and (b) the experiences and perceptions of deprived individuals or groups once interrogated closely would necessarily prove oppositional to the scientifically designed definitions and policies being applied to their lives.

The existence of alternative concepts as well as oppositional views was not at all being denied. But instead, there was an acknowledgement of a shifting and interactive environment. The main assumptions moving forward were: (a) the identities and positions taken by individuals cannot be completely separated from the effects of research and the context in which they were expressed (as such practices in the research itself came into the research question) and (b) the complexities of perceptions of poverty demanded an examination of the often ambiguous interaction between imbricated variables (such as different subject positions) rather than an essentialisation of them. Therefore, new lines of inquiry were drawn to engage the entangled relationship between people’s experiencing of deprivation and the dominant definitional instrument which has been constructed to confer meaning and assist in alleviating the suffering within some of those

experiences. This translated into new specific inquiries in the field that were aimed at exploring: (a) the varying discourses surrounding poverty and who they include and exclude; (b) some of the observable effects of the dominant poverty machinery on people's lives; and (c) the ways people view and represent their living environment.

On returning from the field and reviewing the data so as to address the question of 'the relationship', four separate responses were outlined. Firstly, it was considered essential to excavate a partial social history of present ways of thinking about poverty in Jamaica. This drew on insights from the practice of the three theorists, Bourdieu, Foucault and Williams who were committed to similar endeavours in their own work. Secondly, the data derived from the field was explored focusing on the social relations of research practice and knowledge on poverty. The aim was to understand those aspects of relations of deprivation which "escape the gaze of science" because they are "hidden in the very gaze of the scientist" (Bourdieu, 2001:86). Thirdly, there was a consideration of some of the effects of the way poverty is officially defined on living experiences, specifically those related to spatiality. To use Foucault's (1991a:243) words in describing this endeavour, poverty in official and academic discourses is not "spatialised", yet at the same time it inexorably introduces a set "of problems that were properly seen as spatial". The intricacies of some of these 'spatial problems' were explored through the specificities of the Windsor context. Finally, as inspired by Dodman (2003b) and Ziller (1990) and paying homage to Williams' (1975) affinity for the oppressed and overlooked, Foucault's (1980b) concern with "subjugated knowledges" and de Certeau's (1984) exploration of the *practice of everyday life*, Windsor youths autophotographic accounts of living in Windsor are presented. The findings from this method were used to reflect on the different *theories* or ways of picturing living in Windsor and the potential value of *everydayness* in extending understandings of suffering and relations of deprivation.

According to Bevan and Joireman (1997:317), “the fuzziness, complexity and potential relativity associated with the concept of ‘poverty’ (and relatedly ‘the poor’) arise from the fact that it is a socially constructed ‘essentially contested’ concept, with rhetorical power and political implications”. These hazardous opacities, they contend, inevitably lead “to ultimately unresolvable problems of analysis and measurement, unless the large concept is deconstructed into its constituent parts”. The narrative (re)presented in this work has essentially focused on a critical interrogation of the relationship between poverty (as officially defined) and the deprivation which individuals and groups are continuously and differentially *experiencing*. Pivotal to this goal has been an attempt in each of the four main ‘response chapters’ to take the construct apart so as to examine how, why and to what effect it operates to include some constituents of deprivation (e.g. particular conditions of lack) and exclude others (e.g. underlying social relations). The argument here is that dissecting *poverty* does not particularise the object, but rather, it exposes how the machinations within the object come to constitute subject identities and structure living experiences. This is explained further below, along with an exploration of some resolutions to the conflicts and contradictions identified throughout the research.

### 8.5. The Climax: Pursuits, Principles, Proposals

Insights from Sayad’s (1999) excellent disquisition on the *Suffering of the Immigrant* may be extrapolated and used to illustrate the arguments being presented here. As is the case with the *immigrant*, it can be persuasively contended that there is a need to reflect on the extent to which the *poor* are instantiated by the fact that they are talked about, and more importantly, by the way they are talked about. In this sense, there is no exaggeration in proposing that *poverty* and the *poor*, exist, in reality only inasmuch as these categories of thought and action have already “been



constructed, shaped and designed” (Sayad, 1999:177). Furthermore, perceptions by those determined to be poor, those with the power to determine or those authorised to influence and prescribe the bases for determinations, are unavoidably already structured by “the abstract a priori definition that has been given of that object” (Sayad, 1999:177). The discussion that follows is built upon such propositions.

In four different but interrelated responses, the task has been to “smoke out” power and domination where they are hidden ‘par excellence’, that is, within the *order of things* or within the most innocuous-seeming trivia of the taken-for-granted (Bourdieu, 1985:87, 2001:86; see also, Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:167-168). The ‘response’ chapters also attempted to conduct analyses on the relations surrounding extreme material and symbolic deprivation without referring to an essentialised poverty subject “which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history” (Foucault, 1991b:59). Along these lines, the study delineates and problematises the ways of seeing and practices (in Chapters 2 and 4) used in producing the narrative, before trying to account for:

- (i) (Chapter 3) The emergence and growth of varying poverty discourses, concepts and definitions in the Jamaican context (through a *historicisation of the subject*);
- (ii) (Chapter 5) The complex relations involved in constructing scientific knowledge of poverty (through a reflexive critique of the participatory approach and the impact of method/positionality in interviews);
- (iii) (Chapter 6) The ambivalent exclusions of the poverty construct (through an examination of spatial relations of deprivation and some of their effects);

- (iv) (Chapter 7) Different ways of picturing a deprived environment and the often overlooked interior domains of *seeing*, *doing* and *being in* deprivation (through a discussion of an autophotographic exercise).

Each of these specific inquiries enters the debate on the efficacy of the dominant poverty construct by critically reaching into its relationship with how people suffer through/experience deprivation. The assertion here is that while experiences ineluctably shape the possibilities of meanings, they are also ineluctably shaped by the meanings given to them. Therefore when examining the sites of interaction and/or the 'nature of the relationship', it is important to recognise that because discourses on the processes which constitute poverty are necessarily "part of *the* object of study" then they must also "be taken as *an* object of study" (Sayad, 1999:177, emphasis added).

This research is, in effect, an intervention which is not only an exposition on a poverty *reality*; it is an exposition on the researcher's position in and towards poverty. But vitally, the intervention is also an exposition that aims to be (and may become) a part of the discussion on how poverty will/can be known (Williams, 1975:203). There are very delicate matters of representation in this endeavour. Recognising this fact, in analysing the data and composing this thesis, there was a 'duty of care' towards informants and the foremost concern was finding the best way to respect the various accounts and experiences (which were only ever partially captured and always co-produced) without essentialising them. This was a burdensome balancing act. In the first place, much of what was seen or heard in the field contained narratives of *sufferation* and yet "there is no single way to suffer; there is no timeless or spaceless universal shape to suffering" (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1996:2). To add to this complexity, "all kinds of distortions are embedded in the very structure of the research relationship" (Bourdieu, 1999b:608). The way that burden was handled was to try to bring into question the very meaning of the interviews, observations and other

interactions (Bourdieu, 2007:50) and to try (where possible) to subject the informant's accounts and my practices, and assumptions to similar levels of interrogation.

Accordingly, the first proposal in terms of the direction of poverty research would be an adherence to Bourdieu's (1999b) call for greater understanding and mastery of the multiform "distortions" inherent in practice. This applies equally to quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative assessments dominate the field and though they have limitations, so do the more "in-depth" strategies of gaining knowledge (as may be seen in the critique of participation). In either case, when instruments that will impact on lives and livelihoods are being constructed, it is essential to begin such undertakings with a willingness to acknowledge constraints and reflect on the inevitable effects of the process on the research outcomes. Indeed, "how can we claim to engage in the scientific investigation of presuppositions if we do not work to gain knowledge (*science*) of our presuppositions?" (Bourdieu, 1999b:608).

Four further proposals emerged from the overlapping concerns of the 'response' chapters:

- (i) There exists both rhetorical and lived resistance to dominant conceptions of poverty which are rooted in a history of oppressive relations of deprivation, many of which have been retained in current modes of social organisation. The mass appeal and popular resonance of some of these oppositional understandings of poverty suggests that, from the conceptual stage, there is a need to begin accounting for the experiential meanings given to deprivation. This is not to propose a *poverty as defined by the poor*, but to invite a critically reflexive dialogical engagement and mode of representation.
- (ii) Secondly, even within shared or *in-common* symbolic and experiential spaces there are irreducible differences in how individuals suffer through, endure or

resist deprivation. Both *sufferation* and prospects for improvement are subjective, dynamic and too varied to be captured within any single definition. It is important to begin a debate on the ways to account for difference in generalised constructs. Following Brathwaite and Cole's (1978) recommendation for the future of poverty research in the Caribbean, this may need to be an ongoing inter-disciplinary enterprise. In this sense, there is a need for a *working definition* which recognises that beyond its own confines there are complexities around deprivation which make poverty eradication, especially within current forms of social organisation, only ever aspirational. Thus, the end of poverty should be engaged as an incessant *work in progress*.

- (iii) The term poverty has cultural baggage rooted in a complex mix of historically, socially and scientifically determined characteristics. In the Jamaican context there may be positive symbolic attributes to being poor (e.g. within the *sufferation* discourse). However, there are also altogether more pernicious symbolic possibilities, some of which arise from relations in and around spaces. There is a need, when researching poverty, to account for spatial deprivations and how they conspire to dispossess through the sanguinary regime of extreme marginality. Spatiality however, is not the only factor in poverty's abstraction. For example, relations of deprivation around age form another very important concern. Additionally, though gender is high on the anti-poverty agenda, much of the analyses currently being conducted may not go far enough to exorcise the spectre of masculine domination.
- (iv) Though minute aspects of the everyday experiencing of hardship and lack cannot be easily digested through conventional academic practice, it would be deleterious to dismiss them on this basis since they may provide extensions to current understandings of the relations of deprivation. It is therefore expedient to begin considering ways to access the minutia of the lived. This includes accessing how people feel about the things they do as well as the gritty and sometimes explicit details of how individuals go through their suffering.

All the above propositions and proposals formatively rely on Hulme and Green's (2005) assertion that material scarcity and impoverishment are in essence functions of a society's history and social relations. In conceptualising poverty a decision has to be made on whether the core vision is a society with as few individuals as possible at the minimum/lowest level of human survival (while neglecting other levels of suffering and hardship) or a society with as few incidents as possible of hardship and suffering which are rooted in relations of deprivation. In the latter, which is the proposed conceptual context, the producers of scientific and official discourses would need to take into account the social body as a whole as opposed to the group defined as poor. Also, they would need to continuously reflect on their limitations and the limits of their practice and resulting constructs. But perhaps most importantly, at the centre of this endeavour, there would need to be a more fluid notion of 'social progress' (as opposed to developmentalism) which accounts for *difference*. In such a conceptual environment, it may be possible to qualitatively and quantitatively distinguish and prioritise the most severe forms of impoverishment without the fatuous belief that by removing the worst levels of deprivation, the relations which generate *poverty* (however defined), will have been eradicated.

## **8.6. The Dénouement: On the 'Presence' and 'Absence' of Resonance**

Throughout the thesis, the resonance (and also the lack of it) of the dominant poverty construct with experiences of deprivation has been proposed through various positioned and structured inquiries (*i.e.* on the social history of ideas of poverty, the social relations of the production of poverty knowledge, and so on). However, it is expedient, at this point, to openly frame the exact contours of that complex relationship. To pose the concern of this section in another way, if the

question of the thesis is: “*what is the nature of the relationship between the poverty construct and the ways people experience deprivation?*” then, the response, as projected through the various discussions in this narrative, is that the relationship consists in both the presence and absence of *resonance*. Drawing from Derrida (1982a:13), it may be argued that the act of ascribing/discerning meaning is only possible if each so-called *present* element or *trace* “is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future”. Thus, a meaning that is given to poverty may be more or less viable relative to the *traces* it contains, such as: (a) retentions/departures from past ways of seeing (in discourses and counter-discourses); (b) varying connections/disconnections with living experiences; and (c) accepted/resisted determinations on *reality* (expert and experiential). It is by looking inside these *traces* that it became possible to examine aspects of the interaction between the language of poverty (used to identify/explain certain forms of deprivation) and how people *go through* extreme material and symbolic deprivation (many of which come to be called poverty).

Much has been said in the preceding pages, about the inadequacies of Jamaica’s official definition of poverty. Given particular emphasis is the issue of the role of those (policy-makers and academics) who promulgate the construct and are thereby instrumental in shaping perceptions and experiences of/by deprived individuals and groups. There is a danger that this line of argument may be read as a postulation of the idea that *the strong and powerful do what they can and the weak and poor suffer what they must* (Arendt, 1944:353). Yet, on the contrary, a more complex idea of power has been maintained throughout, as informed by Foucault’s contention that:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces

pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as *a productive network which runs through the whole social body*, much more than as a negative instance whose function is representation (Foucault, 1991b:61, emphasis added).

It is in the sense of a 'creative force' that the nature of the relationship between the construct and the living experiences investigated in this research has had to be positioned as one of 'resonance'. Therefore, rather than a complete disconnection or unequivocal opposition (which was the original position taken), there is an attempt to recognise that there is some applicability to people's lives which sits alongside the resistances poverty construct. This was neither an easy concession to make for a stance that was decidedly set against *power* (or rather an operational interpretation of power as domination) nor a simple argument to maintain and illustrate. Indeed, identifying, naming and representing the nature of the poverty construct's interaction with people's lived deprivations is incredibly difficult especially because it was often simultaneously accepted, denied and resisted in discussions on the poverty experience. This already intricate and puzzling entanglement was further problematised by the fact that the official discourse and approach actively live through and within the machineries of state which inevitably constitute a large part of the social relations all Jamaican citizens.

Though there were many other instances of the 'ins and outs' of the construct, two of the pivotal incidents in the research can be considered here as exemplifications of the argument being made. On one hand, there was an almost immediate scepticism and even disbelief when the participants of YFG1 unanimously affirmed the dominant idea that poverty was essentially material in nature. On the other, from YFG2, there was equal bemusement at the notion that everybody in Windsor is poor and initially, this was not viewed with more than a speculative interest in what was taken to be an unfounded though interesting idea. In the first of these cases (YFG1) it is possible to invoke a relationship comprised of the 'presence of resonance', with

experience while in the second (YFG2) it is possible to invoke relationship comprised of the 'absence of resonance' with experience. In essence, both of these bear *traces* of truth that may be used to reflect on the viability of the poverty construct.

Resonance (or the lack of it) is to be found, not in examining which of the above propositions is more *real* or *true*, but in the critical exploration of their *truth effects* (e.g. access/non-access to state aid) as produced from discourses (and counter-discourses) on poverty "which in themselves are neither true nor false" (Foucault, 1991b:60). In fact, no experience of poverty, however defined, and no experience of any analytical structure that has been proposed here can be said to exist (*i.e.* as incontrovertible objective reality) in the form it was given in a historical moment (Scott, 1991:792). This does not mean that the interactions through discursive concepts and structures do not produce identifiable effects. On the contrary, the claim being made is that the poverty construct is integral in structuring how the machinery of state operates and so it inevitably impacts on people's lives. In this sense, both the presence and absence of resonance can be said to have material and symbolic consequences for the experiencing of deprivation. In addition, both presence and absence were integral to the ability to place the concept of poverty within the realm of empirical discovery and then to denounce its limits while at the same time treating it as a tool that can be applicable to the way people live and perceive their realities (Derrida, 1978:368). To illustrate the propositions made above further, it may be argued there are adverse effects in the 'presence of resonance' and potential in the 'absence of resonance'. Thus, from YFG1, poverty can be viewed as a tool, which in its focus on lacks (e.g. material "basic needs"), may effectively delineate some aspects of experience and address them. This becomes a *problem* because the experiences it covers are totalised as those that conclusively account for the sufferings that need to be addressed in society. In fact, it is difficult for many deprived persons, politicians or academics to conceive of poverty outside of its monetary dimensions. Conversely, from YFG2 it



may be argued that poverty is a tool, even when it does not accommodate some aspects of experience (e.g. spatiality), that often may be co-opted and used to resist its own exclusions. The potential is that popular strategies and struggles of resistance which often disrupt and corrupt official designs have aided many in their survival and they may begin to influence the centres of discourse production.

Another trace that must be highlighted resides in the notion of *experiencing* which has been presented in the title of this thesis and used at various points in the narrative. On one hand, this rhetorical device has been inspired by a need to recognise the complexities of poverty research (Chambers, 1995) and those theorists who contest the apotheosised presentation of 'lived experiences' in social sciences in general (Williams, 1983; Tournier, 1987; Scott, 1991; Bourdieu, 2007). On the other hand, it bears the burden of conveying that the language of deprivation and suffering taken from the field and disseminated in these pages, in many cases, 'continuously' remains a part of people's everyday living. In this way, "the experiencing of deprivation" as posited here draws on the local parlance of *sufferation* or *going through* and surviving what are perceived as historically structured oppressive relations which have persisted into Jamaican modernity. The resistance of oppression (through language and other aspects of living) is a recurring theme in the thesis and yet *always* more common than the more ostensible signs of dissonance is the *resilience* of individuals and groups who become able to bear the burden and *weight of the world* – those who endure the constant *downpression* of the social order. To the extent that there is a perception that "the system design to keep the poor man down" (Turbulence, *Poor Man's Place*, 2007), the ability to endure daily deprivation and hardship becomes a prized attribute in parts of Jamaican culture. Experiencing then, not only takes on intellectually prescribed regalia; it also tries to resonate by capturing, representing, and appealing to those popular discourses on survival in the perpetual struggle against deprivation.

If my aim through this research was to stand in an antipodean position to the dominant definition of poverty and therefrom demand its erasure, then I would have failed miserably. But, my main objective was to contribute to the debate on the efficacy of the construct from a critical and always *partial* position. Ultimately, the assertion I make is that there is a need to reconceptualise poverty within a mode of practice that is reflexively dialogical and from a position which takes the subject as part of the object through exploring social relations. I have proposed the idea that poverty abstraction is woven firmly 'in' (presence) and also quite profoundly 'out' (absence) of people's living experiences of relational deprivation. The notion of resonance assists in this enterprise by allowing me to employ "relative efficacy" of the dominant poverty construct so as to expose the inanity of the machinery to which it belongs (Derrida, 1978:359). Inasmuch as this characterisation has been drawn from Derrida's commentary on the work of Lévi-Strauss, it is also an embodiment of the behaviour and accounts of many Windsor residents. This kind of interaction between those who create intellectual possibilities by sharing accounts of their *experiencing* of deprivation and those who have provided the theoretical equipment to experiment has been used throughout this narrative. It is by setting in motion these exchanges that I learned the importance and promise of utilising the concept of poverty, whose truth value is always in question, as an instrument of resistance and transgression, with possibilities for liberation.

## 8.7. Summary Points

### 8.7.1 Summary of the Main Contributions of the Thesis to Theory

**Table 8:1 Table Summarising the Main Contributions of the Thesis to Theory**

Confirmed...	Synthesised...	Added...	Challenged...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green and Hulme's (2005) contention that poverty is rooted in the history and social relations of societies.</li> <li>The well established distinction between deprivation and poverty (Simmel, 1965; Sen, 1979; Townsend, 1987; Yapa, 1995).</li> <li>Bourdieu's (1970) finding that the private space is organised along the same oppositions as the rest of the social world.</li> <li>Lefebvre's (1991) proposition that representations of scientists, urbanists, etc. become dominant in shaping perceptions of places.</li> <li>Some of Tilly's (2000) observations on spatial relations in contentious politics by applying them to occurrences in the Windsor community.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foucault's (1980a) propositions on the development of present modes of understanding poverty with Bourdieu's call for an examination of social history.</li> <li>De Certeau's (1984) proposition on 'everydayness' and Williams' (1975) call to recognise the intricacies of the way things are done into an exploration of the minutia of daily suffering in Windsor.</li> <li>Said's (2003) Orientalism in a discussion on the way 'geographic imaginaries' begin to shape malignant attitudes to deprived places.</li> <li>Foucault's (1991b) notion of power as a 'productive network' into the observed pattern of official poverty discourses.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To Bevan and Joireman's (1997) argument that experiences are complex and not easily translated to concepts by using Williams (1983) and Scott (1991) to put forward an idea of 'experiencing'.</li> <li>An examination of the implications of dislocation from a 'place-identity' to the concept of 'homo pauperis' (Dean, 1991).</li> <li>To Patterson's (1982) explication of 'social death' and extended it to a discussion on 'rights' and political embodiment of informal communities within Jamaica.</li> <li>Bourdieu's (2001) reflexivity to the contributions of feminist researchers (Haraway 1988; Opie, 1992) in proposing a 'co-produced' narrative.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sen's (1983) view that there is an absolute core to poverty on which all positions can agree.</li> <li>The view that participatory methods can capture and represent an unadulterated version of '<i>poverty as defined by the poor</i>' (Baker-Collins, 2005).</li> <li>The assertion that income/consumption measures are sufficient to represent the depth of poverty (Ravallion, 1992).</li> <li>Boltanski's argument that 'photography lies' and is incapable of illustrating identity (Boltanski &amp; Renard 1994).</li> </ol>

### **8.7.2 Summary of the Thesis' Contribution to the Literature on Poverty and to the 'Development Project'**

**The thesis contributes to the literature:**

- (i) A critical commentary on methodological practices which follows and interrogates the development of the propositions that are made by the researcher.
- (ii) A case study confirming the propositions made by Lister (2004), Green & Hulme (2005), and Green (2006) depicting poverty as a phenomenon rooted in social relations.
- (iii) A multidisciplinary examination of different aspects of deprivation borrowed from a number of subject bases including sociology, geography, history and political sciences.
- (iv) The beginnings of a discussion of those mundane aspects of 'everyday' life that are often ignored in research, but that may be vital to understandings of social structures and relations.
- (v) An extension of the longstanding claim that a homogenised category of the poor has been 'constructed' (Dean, 1991; Pithouse, 2003; Round & Kosterina 2005) by proposing the idea of processes of 'pooring' which engulf many persons who are experiencing deprivation.
- (vi) A recognition of the fact that those considered poor are not "naked" or without agency. It borrows from Brodber (1975), Hooks (1994) and McGregor (2004) to a call for researchers to begin considering what the poor have and what they can do.
- (vii) A proposal for re-conceptualising poverty which requires critical debate. It asserts that there should be a shift from conceiving of poverty as a condition

associated with minimum level of human survival to one which takes its aim at the relations which produce the different extremes and forms of deprivations.

**The thesis contributes to the ‘development project’:**

- (i) By drawing on Mouffe (1999, 2005), Elias (1995) and Nancy (1990) to propose a more deliberative framework for designing and assessing the social progress connoted by the term development. This includes taking into account differences between people’s experiencing of deprivation and their ‘will to improve’.
- (ii) A critical review of aspects of the practices within the Jamaican development project that takes into account how the declared aims are mismatched with results.
- (iii) A critique of some of the assumptions underlying the ‘developmentalism’ which drives the neoliberal project and which continues to malign many genuine moves toward social progress.
- (iv) A research project that draws on various subjects that are inextricably tied into but not always considered in traditional studies undertaken in the field of development.
- (v) A critical commentary on and a call for a revision of the dominant approach to poverty which sits at the heart of the development paradigm.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A: Tables Representing Data Used

Table A:1 Overview of Methods and Outputs

Method Used	Output
Reflexive Diary Keeping	Diary entries were made on (a) data collection activities; (b) observations of events/incidents and (c) on general thoughts
Interviews	Recordings; Interview Transcripts
Focus Group	Worksheets; Notes on occurrences in the meeting
Autophotography	Photographs; Review Transcripts

Table A:3 Focus Group Sessions

Sessions	Number of participants	Date
Adult Focus Group 1	10	1 May 2008
Adult Focus Group 2	10	2 May 2008
Youth Focus Group 1	13	8 May 2008
Youth Focus Group 2	12	9 May 2008

Table A:4 Autophotography

Review Session #	Participant	Number of Pictures	Date of Photo Review Session
1	Tango	12	20 August 2008
2	Singer	18	21 August 2008
3	Bones	14	22 August 2008
4	Kelly	12	26 August 2008
5	Jo	12	29 August 2008
6	Candice	14	2 September 2008
7	Delano	13	3 September 2008
8	Sean	20	4 September 2008

Table A:2 Interview Dates

#	Pseudonym	Date Interviewed
1	Juggler	10 March 2008
2	Deejay	11 March 2008
3	Keeno	14 March 2008
4	Dice	20 March 2008
5	Tango	2 April 2008
6	Gangalee	9 April 2008
7	Auntie Nez	15 April 2008
8	Singer	22 April 2008
9	Jessy	23 April 2008
10	Kelly	28 April 2008
11	Ryan	5 June 2008
12	Pursey	6 June 2008
13	Mack	7 June 2008
14	Cherry	11 June 2008
15	Jerry	13 June 2008
16	Neesy	13 June 2008
17	Tammy	16 June 2008
18	Larry	16 June 2008
19	Tango	19 June 2008
20	Baller	20 June 2008
21	Prento	25 June 2008
22	Buju	25 June 2008
23	Rennae	27 June 2008
24	Michelle	2 July 2008
25	Bangles	4 July 2008
26	Noella	4 July 2008
27	Candice	9 July 2008
28	Bones	14 July 2008
29	Paul	18 July 2008
30	Delano	13 August 2008
31	Sean	13 August 2008
32	Dana	14 August 2008
33	Mr Charles	16 August 2008
34	Miss Vicky	26 August 2008
35	Charmaine	28 August 2008
36	Orville	7 November 2009
37	Miss G	16 November 2009

Table A:5 Data Determined to be 'Significant' from Field Diary

Negotiating Access	Orville	26 January 2008; 9 February 2008
	Mack	13 February 2008
	Mr James	13 February 2008
	Pursey	13 February 2008
	Miss Vicky	19 February 2008
Informal Conversations	Sparky	26 May 2008
	Orville	03 June 2008
	Prento	12 June 2008
	Tango	05 July 2008
	Singer	28 August 2008
Hang Out Occasions	In the occasions selected, very interesting discussions were had on issues relating to the	
Events	Entry meeting	04 March 2008
	Commissioned map of Windsor	08 May 2008
	Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA)	21 May 2008
	News report on Psycho's death and ensuing	22 May 2008
	Collected map of Windsor	17 June 2008
	Recruiting volunteers for autophotographic exercise	12 August 2008
	Urban Development Corporation(UDC) meeting	18 August 2008
	Announced cricket prize at youth club meeting	19 August 2008
	Cricket Award Ceremony	24 August 2008
	Officially announced departure at Youth Club	02 September 2008
	Miss Windsor pre-pageant party	13 November 2009
Incidents	Riot at Black Party's office	02 June 2008
	Thieving Light	14 July 2008

## APPENDIX B: Research Calendar

Figure B:1 Research Calendar

January 2008			February 2008			March 2008			April 2008			May 2008		
Tuesday	1		Friday	1		Saturday	1		Tuesday	1	WUCYC meeting	Thursday	1	AFG 1 (10 ppl)
Wednesday	2		Saturday	2		Sunday	2		Wednesday	2	Int (5): Tango	Friday	2	AFG 2 (10 ppl)
Thursday	3		Sunday	3		Monday	3		Thursday	3		Saturday	3	
Friday	4		Monday	4		Tuesday	4	FDE (SE): Entry meeting	Friday	4		Sunday	4	
Saturday	5		Tuesday	5				WUCYC meeting	Saturday	5		Monday	5	
Sunday	6		Wednesday	6		Wednesday	5		Sunday	6		Tuesday	6	WUCYC meeting
Monday	7		Thursday	7		Thursday	6		Monday	7	FDE: Hang out	Wednesday	7	
Tuesday	8		Friday	8		Friday	7		Tuesday	8	WUCYC meeting			YFG 1 (13 ppl)
Wednesday	9		Saturday	9	FDE (NA): Orville	Saturday	8		Wednesday	9	Int (6): Gangalee	Thursday	8	FDE(SE): Requested map
Thursday	10		Sunday	10		Sunday	9		Thursday	10		Friday	9	YFG 2 (12 ppl)
Friday	11		Monday	11		Monday	10	Int (1): Juggler	Friday	11		Saturday	10	Unplanned formal research break starts
Saturday	12		Tuesday	12	WUCYC meeting	Tuesday	11	Int (2): DeeJay	Saturday	12		Sunday	11	
Sunday	13	Arrived in JA	Wednesday	13	FDE (NA): Mack			WUCYC meeting	Sunday	13		Monday	12	
Monday	14				FDE (NA): Mr James	Wednesday	12		Monday	14		Tuesday	13	WUCYC meeting
Tuesday	15				FDE (NA): Pursey	Thursday	13		Tuesday	15	Int (7): Auntie Nez	Wednesday	14	
Wednesday	16		Thursday	14		Friday	14	Int (3): Keeno			WUCYC meeting	Thursday	15	
Thursday	17		Friday	15		Saturday	15		Wednesday	16		Friday	16	
Friday	18		Saturday	16		Sunday	16		Thursday	17		Saturday	17	
Saturday	19		Sunday	17		Monday	17		Friday	18		Sunday	18	
Sunday	20		Monday	18		Tuesday	18	WUCYC meeting	Saturday	19		Monday	19	
Monday	21		Tuesday	19	WUCYC meeting	Wednesday	19		Sunday	20		Tuesday	20	WUCYC meeting
Tuesday	22				FDE (NA): Miss Vicky	Thursday	20	Int (4): Dice	Monday	21		Wednesday	21	FDE (SE): RADA
Wednesday	23		Wednesday	20		Friday	21		Tuesday	22	Int (8): Singer	Thursday	22	FDE (SE): Psycho news
Thursday	24		Thursday	21		Saturday	22	FDE: Hang out			WUCYC meeting	Friday	23	
Friday	25		Friday	22		Sunday	23		Wednesday	23	Int (9): Jessy	Saturday	24	
Saturday	26	FDE (NA): Orville	Saturday	23		Monday	24		Thursday	24		Sunday	25	
Sunday	27		Sunday	24		Tuesday	25	WUCYC meeting	Friday	25		Monday	26	FDE (SIC): Sparky
Tuesday	29		Tuesday	26	WUCYC meeting	Wednesday	26		Sunday	27		Tuesday	27	WUCYC meeting
Wednesday	30		Wednesday	27		Friday	28		Monday	28	Int (10): Kelly	Thursday	29	
Thursday	31		Thursday	28		Saturday	29		Tuesday	29	WUCYC meeting	Friday	30	
			Friday	29		Sunday	30		Wednesday	30		Saturday	31	Research break ends
						Monday	31							

### Key

WUCYC meeting	Windsor Uprising Community Youth Club - weekly meetings	FDE (NA)	Field Diary Entry - Negotiating Access	AFG	Adult Focus Group Session
Int	Interviews	FDE (SIC)	Field Diary Entry - Significant Informal Conversations	YFG	Youth Focus Group Session
PRS	Photo Review Sessions	FDE (SE)	Field Diary Entry - Significant Event	<b>Note:</b> Calendar excludes some regular events attended (e.g. cricket/ football games) and encounters that were not considered significant	
FDE: Hang Out	Field Diary Entry - Significant Hang Out Occasions	FDE (SI)	Field Diary Entry - Significant Incident		



## Appendix B: Research Calendar

### Research Calendar continued...

June 2008		July 2008		August 2008		September 2008		November 2009	
Sunday	1	Tuesday	1 WUCYC meeting	Friday	1	Monday	1	Sunday	1
Monday	2 FDE (SI): Riot	Wednesday	2 Int (24): Michelle	Saturday	2	Tuesday	2 PRS (6): Candice	Monday	2 Arrive in Jamaica
Tuesday	3 FDE (SIC): Orville	Thursday	3	Sunday	3		FDE (SE) : Leaving meeting	Tuesday	3 WUCYC meeting
	WUCYC meeting	Friday	4 Int (25): Bangles	Monday	4		WUCYC meeting	Wednesday	4
Wednesday	4 FDE: Hang out		Int (26): Noella	Tuesday	5	Wednesday	3 PRS (7): Delano	Thursday	5
Thursday	5 Int (11): Ryan	Saturday	5 FDE (SIC): Tango	Wednesday	6	Thursday	4 PRS (8): Sean	Friday	6
Friday	6 Int (12): Pursey	Sunday	6	Thursday	7	Friday	5	Saturday	7 Int (36): Orville
Saturday	7 Int (13): Mack	Monday	7	Friday	8	Saturday	6 Left Jamaica	Sunday	8
Sunday	8	Tuesday	8 WUCYC meeting	Saturday	9	Sunday	7	Monday	9
Monday	9	Wednesday	9 Int (27): Candice	Sunday	10	Monday	8	Tuesday	10 WUCYC meeting
Tuesday	10 WUCYC meeting	Thursday	10	Monday	11	Tuesday	9	Wednesday	11
Wednesday	11 Int (14): Cherry	Friday	11	Tuesday	12 FDE (SE): Autophotography recruitment	Wednesday	10	Thursday	12
Thursday	12 FDE (SIC): Preto	Saturday	12		WUCYC meeting	Thursday	11	Friday	13 FDE (SE): Pageant party
Friday	13 Int (15): Jerry	Sunday	13	Wednesday	13 Int (30): Delano	Friday	12	Saturday	14
	Int (16): Neesy	Monday	14 Int (28): Bones	Thursday	14 Int (31): Sean	Saturday	13	Sunday	15
Saturday	14		FDE (SI): Thieving light	Friday	15	Sunday	14	Monday	16 Int (37): Miss G
Sunday	15	Tuesday	15 WUCYC meeting	Saturday	16 Int (33): Mr Charles	Monday	15	Tuesday	17 WUCYC meeting
Monday	16 Int (17): Tammy	Wednesday	16	Sunday	17	Tuesday	16	Wednesday	18
	Int (18): Larry	Thursday	17 FDE: Hang out	Monday	18 FDE (SE): UDC	Wednesday	17	Thursday	19
Tuesday	17 FDE (SE): Collected map	Friday	18 Int (29): Paul	Tuesday	19 FDE (SE): Announced prize	Thursday	18	Friday	20
Wednesday	18	Saturday	19 Planned research break starts	Wednesday	20 PRS (1): Tango	Friday	19	Saturday	21 Left Jamaica
Thursday	19 Int (19): Tango	Sunday	20	Thursday	21 PRS (2): Singer	Saturday	20	Sunday	22
Friday	20 Int (20): Baller	Monday	21	Friday	22 PRS (3): Bones	Sunday	21	Monday	23
Saturday	21	Tuesday	22	Saturday	23	Monday	22	Tuesday	24
Sunday	22	Wednesday	23	Wednesday	24 FDE (SE): Cricket awards	Tuesday	23	Wednesday	25
Monday	23	Thursday	24	Thursday	25	Wednesday	24	Thursday	26
Tuesday	24 WUCYC meeting	Friday	25	Friday	26 Int (34): Miss Vicky	Thursday	25	Friday	27
Wednesday	25 Int (21): Preto	Sunday	27	Saturday	27	Friday	26	Sunday	29
	Int (22): Buju	Monday	28	Sunday	28 Int (35): Charmaine	Saturday	27	Monday	30
Thursday	26	Tuesday	29	Monday	29 PRS (5): Jo	Sunday	28		
Friday	27 Int (23): Rennae	Wednesday	30	Tuesday	30	Monday	29		
Saturday	28	Thursday	31	Wednesday	31	Tuesday	30		
Sunday	29			Thursday					
Monday	30			Friday					
				Saturday					
				Sunday					

### Key

WUCYC meeting	Windsor Uprising Community Youth Club - weekly meetings	FDE (NA)	Field Diary Entry - Negotiating Access	AFG	Adult Focus Group Session
Int	Interviews	FDE (SIC)	Field Diary Entry - Significant Informal Conversations	YFG	Youth Focus Group Session
PRS	Photo Review Sessions	FDE (SE)	Field Diary Entry - Significant Event	<b>Note:</b> Calendar excludes some regular events attended (e.g. cricket/ football games) and encounters that were not considered significant	
FDE: Hang Out	Field Diary Entry - Significant Hang Out Occasions	FDE: (SI)	Field Diary Entry - Significant Incident		

## APPENDIX C: Encounters with Development

In an endeavour to familiarise myself with the various anti-poverty initiatives operating in St. Ann, I made contact with the Social Development Commission (SDC) which facilitates both private and public sector interventions in the St. Ann area. I was able to be a witness to a number of sensitisation sessions, training workshops and meetings which fell under the umbrella of pro-poor development. Two are described below:

### Field Diary Entry: 'Development for Farmers'

**Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 2008**

I attended an agricultural training initiative organised in the community of Lime Hall by the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA), in cooperation with the Agricultural Support Services Project (ASSP). The arrangements for the meeting were organised by the SDC as was the mobilisation. Like the residents, I was told that RADA would be hosting a very important training and information session at the community centre. Farmers would be given information on the government's programme of support in the area and new ideas and techniques for farming would be introduced to "help increase productivity and promote development for poor farmers".

The meeting hall of the community centre was packed and people sat on the outside wall or stood by the window. At about 10:30 am the meeting commenced and it was announced that the first presentation was to be made by Mr. Brown of [a St. Ann based company]<sup>64</sup>, and then the RADA representative would conclude by handing out free fertilisers and seeds.

Mr. Brown explained that his company had been supported by the ASSP to acquire from a Canadian livestock genetics company, the sperm of a special breed of pigs which would improve the quality, the litter size and the weight of current pig stocks. There was a 45 minute presentation on the process of obtaining the sperm, and the attributes and advantages of this new breed. The sperm would cost JA \$20,000 per vial, and free training for insemination would be provided.

At an early stage the portents for the meeting were not looking good. About ten minutes into the presentation one resident tried to ask a question, however he was told that questions would be

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<sup>64</sup> The company name has been removed and the representative has been anonymised.

taken after Mr. Brown had finished speaking. He duly stormed out along with four of his friends. The crowd outside also began to thin at this stage.

After the presentation had ended one person asked: “we don’t really raise pig round here too much because we don’t have no market for them. You going to help us get market for them and tell us where we can sell them?” The tone of his response was quite impolite: “well that is not really our business. We sell sperm to people who are pig breeders. They get their own markets.” The meeting broke out into pandemonium and at this point people started pouring out of the centre shouting expletives and calling their friends to come along. The response from the questioner was caustic: “you call us down here and tell people about training and development and how we going to get help from the government and is this you come with?” Someone else shouted: “I could be in my farm doing work right now! And you carry me down here telling people about buy sperm and look market”.

A partially successful attempt was made by the meeting convenors to calm tempers and to reassure the residents. As soon as a semblance of order had been restored, another question was thrown at Mr. Brown which he tried to deal with a bit more diplomatically, but the mood had been set: “so what happen if you buy the sperm and the pigs dead or they don’t come out?” He answered: “It is a 50/50 chance whether you get good litter and you have to take care of the vial and store it properly. That is why we give free training to help make sure you have the best chance, but each vial is 20,000 dollars”. Again there was uproar: “and is this you call poor people to tell them? You know how hard 20,000 dollars is to come by?”

One interesting back and forth went: **Farmer:** “All you good for is to thief poor people money. This is not development for we, this is more money for you”. **Mr. Brown:** “But it will help you develop as a farmer”. **Farmer:** “How it going to help me develop, most of us in here don’t even have a pig, except two little something at the back of the yard”.

As more people left the centre and the vitriolics got more severe the RADA agent took charge of the meeting. With the crowd quite sparse and getting smaller he informed everyone there was free fertiliser and seeds available and that they could collect these items.

#### **Field Diary Entry: ‘Regularisation and Improvement for Commercial Squatters’**

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 2008**

I attended a meeting at the Runaway Bay Beach organised for the commercial squatters who sell art and crafts to visitors from nearby hotels. The workers were informed last Thursday (the 14<sup>th</sup> of

August), by an SDC officer that a lady from the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) who was in charge of the beach they worked on, would be travelling from Kingston to meet with them. The meeting was arranged for 4 pm today and they would be able to discuss how they could be “regularised” and authorised to work on the beach with “improved facilities”.

The SDC officer and I arrived at around 3:30 pm and we chatted with the vendors as they told us that they were very familiar with the UDC as they had a long and fraught relationship with the organisation. We were told that the police at the behest of the UDC had destroyed their stalls a number of times and that even though they had made numerous attempts to improve conditions they were always being knocked back. The vendors (some of whom had been selling in this spot for 15 years) seemed to have expert knowledge on the geological properties of their environment. They explained, for example, that the real reason why they hadn’t been moved off the beach before was that the land just behind them had sinkholes and could not be built on.

4 pm came and went with no sign of the UDC representatives. At about 5:30 pm the SDC officer received a call to say that there was a problem with traffic and so the party would be late. At around 7 pm, two women and two men arrived. We later learned the men were plain clothes police officers to “protect” the UDC staff. About 12 of the most resilient occupants of the beach had remained eager to be informed about their hopes for formalisation.

The UDC agent informed the group that they were there to conduct a survey exercise so as to assess sanitary conditions on the beach and evaluate the environmental impact of the workers. For about 20 minutes questions were asked about, how many were on the beach, what they did with rubbish, where they used the bathroom, approximately how many tourists they sold to each day, *etc.*

When the survey was finished, the vendors began asking questions: “How come they tell us you come to talk to us about how we can get to work here properly?” The reply was that there had been a “misunderstanding” and that this meeting was just to assess the conditions of the beach and to inform them of processes afoot to allow them to sell in “better” parts of St. Ann. A number of other questions were asked and answered about this. Eventually, one person apparently seeking finality, asked: “so we can’t stay here and you want to move us?” The reply was: “I’m afraid so. This is prime tourism beach front and we are getting too many complaints from the hotels. Maybe what you can do is form an association and go to the different hotels and work out arrangements with them. But the beach front will have to be cleared. Don’t worry though we will have somewhere for you to sell your crafts”.

Not much more was said. The vendors were thanked for staying, apologies were made for being late and the meeting was adjourned.

After the UDC party had left, the SDC officer was accosted by the group for tricking them into this kind of meeting. They showed adeptness at bureaucratic processes in their complaints. For example, they were angry that it will be said that they were duly informed about the UDC plans and told plans for them to “improve”. “That is what they do when they come with the police. But we did not want their improvement, so when they usually call meeting nobody don’t come”. He apologised and explained that he only invited them to the meeting and gave them the information as he had been told.

Before leaving the vendors noted that their consolation was that nothing is going to happen on the beach anyway. So if they were moved, they would simply wait for a time and return to rebuild their shops.

## APPENDIX D: Letters from Windsor Children




My Community

My name is [redacted] and I am writing to tell you about my community.

Dear Developers

I thank you, for investigating in my community. These people in my community really need some help understanding there self and how they live. Some of them talk bad things about Christian and the Church they attend. Some are jealous of the way people dress to go to parties and dances. Once again I thank you for investigating in my community. And thank you for holding this meeting.

Sincerely,  
[redacted]



I Want to be.

my name: [redacted]

I want to be a teacher.

and why because I am intelligent.



## My community

I live in the community of Windsor. It is in the parish of S.T. Ann. I love my community because of the environment. It has two churches and a school. It also has a stand pipe which supply my community.



My name is: [REDACTED]

I want to be a teacher.

And why because I am intelligent.

And I want to teach mathematics.

What I love most about my community

I love to play and the ball ground at evening times

## APPENDIX E: Language

In this brief commentary, I reflect on the Jamaican Creole (JC) popularly called Patwa (also referred to as Patois), and I attempt to provide clarification on the way it has been translated in this thesis.

Pollard argued that Patwa “has traditionally been the speech form of the Jamaican poor” and she proposed that the poor’s increased education and exposure to the middle-class who predominantly use Standard Jamaican English (SJE) “has accounted for the JC/SJE continuum which has become a commonplace in describing the Jamaican language situation” (1980:32). While the position of Patwa has been “rising and the number of situations in which the exclusive use of English as a social requirement is rapidly shrinking” (Devonish, 1997:74), there remains a stark divide in the status associated with Jamaican speech patterns and Patwa is often still seen or referred to as ‘talking bad’ or speaking in ‘broken’/‘bad’ English. The dilemma faced in writing this thesis was: how do I opt out of the denigration of the versatile and extremely important (in terms of cultural resistance to domination) Jamaican Creole and still present a narrative that is widely digestible. There was no easy solution and I tried to strike a balance.

In almost all my formal and informal engagements with informants during my fieldwork, Patwa was used as I saw interacting in the local vernacular as one way of easing possible linguistic tensions that might arise in developing rapport. In this sense, I saw my command of the vernacular and my love of it as one less symbolic barrier to negotiate. Yet, in writing the thesis and representing the voices captured in my interviews, informal conversations, focus groups and other field interactions, I saw a need to translate Patwa into *understandable* English (though not



Standard English) so as to facilitate ease of reading and increase the accessibility of the narrative. An attempt was made with this conversion to, on the one hand provide clarity and make the thesis easily legible. On the other hand, there was an effort to maintain some of the structure and content of the interchanges in the textual representation. Below I have selected an example from my thesis (see page 240-241) to use as an illustration of some of the significant aspects of my interpretation of Patwa and then two tables with some of the most common words that have been translated.

**Table E:1 Illustration of Translation from Patwa to Standard English**

Nutten nuh deh deh fih wih innuh daddy...	Nothing not there for we, you know daddy...
...caught if ih did deh deh...	...cause if it was there...
...den everyday wih ooden affih ah bax trash outtah ag mout fih survive	...then everyday we wouldn't have to be boxing trash out of hog mouth to survive

In the illustration above the words “deh deh” are converted to “there”. In fact, “deh deh” could have viably been substituted for “out there”. Yet, my reading of the words within the context of the exchanges surrounding it, led to an interpretation of “there” which suggests anywhere, as opposed to “out there” which particularises a location. There are also ungrammatical retentions in the translation such as “we” (in the phrase “nothing not there for we”) instead of “us”. This is because these types of breaks with Standard English are seen as easily understandable, without changing that part of the form of what was said. On the other hand, “den everyday wih ooden affih *ah bax* trash” was changed to “then everyday we wouldn’t have to *be boxing* trash” which did not maintain a tense structure that could arguably have been retained (*i.e.* “bax” to “box” rather than “boxing”). The basis for this alteration was that the use of “ah” before “bax” made it a continuous rather than a normal verb. As such, the meaning that the informant was trying to convey, as I interpreted it, superseded a closer reproduction of the structure of the expression. When translating from Patwa to English, I attempted to: (a) ensure that first and foremost the

meaning of words and phrases was retained; (b) provide maximum possible clarity for English speakers; and (c) retain as much as possible of the less complex Patwa words and phrases. Thus, though my practice did not hold to a rigid set of translation rules.

**Table E:2 Some Patwa Words that were Regularly Used in the Interviews and their Standard English Translations**

<b>Simple Patwa Words</b>	<b>Standard English</b>	<b>Complex Patwa Words</b>	<b>Standard English</b>
Dem	Them/They	Gwaan	Going on
Mi	Me	Innah	Into/In there
Dat	That	Innuh	You know
Di	The	Nuff	Many
Yuh	You	Dem deh	Those
Cyan	Can	Lick	Hit/Smack
Cyaah	Can't	Yah/Yahso	Here
Dung	Down	Dehso	There
Ting	Thing	Smady	Somebody
Nutten	Nothing	Seh	Say/That
Leff	Leave/Left	Unnuh	All of you
Wah	What	Pickney	Child

It is essential to declare that the explanations and clarifications presented are not indicative of how Patwa is understood in Jamaica as a whole. Rather, the above describes aspects of my interpretation, practice and representation of it. Partly, this is meant to demonstrate the core of the strategy employed in translating the talk used throughout the thesis and partly, it is meant to stand as another exemplification of the interpretive work that is involved in almost every aspect of research.

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